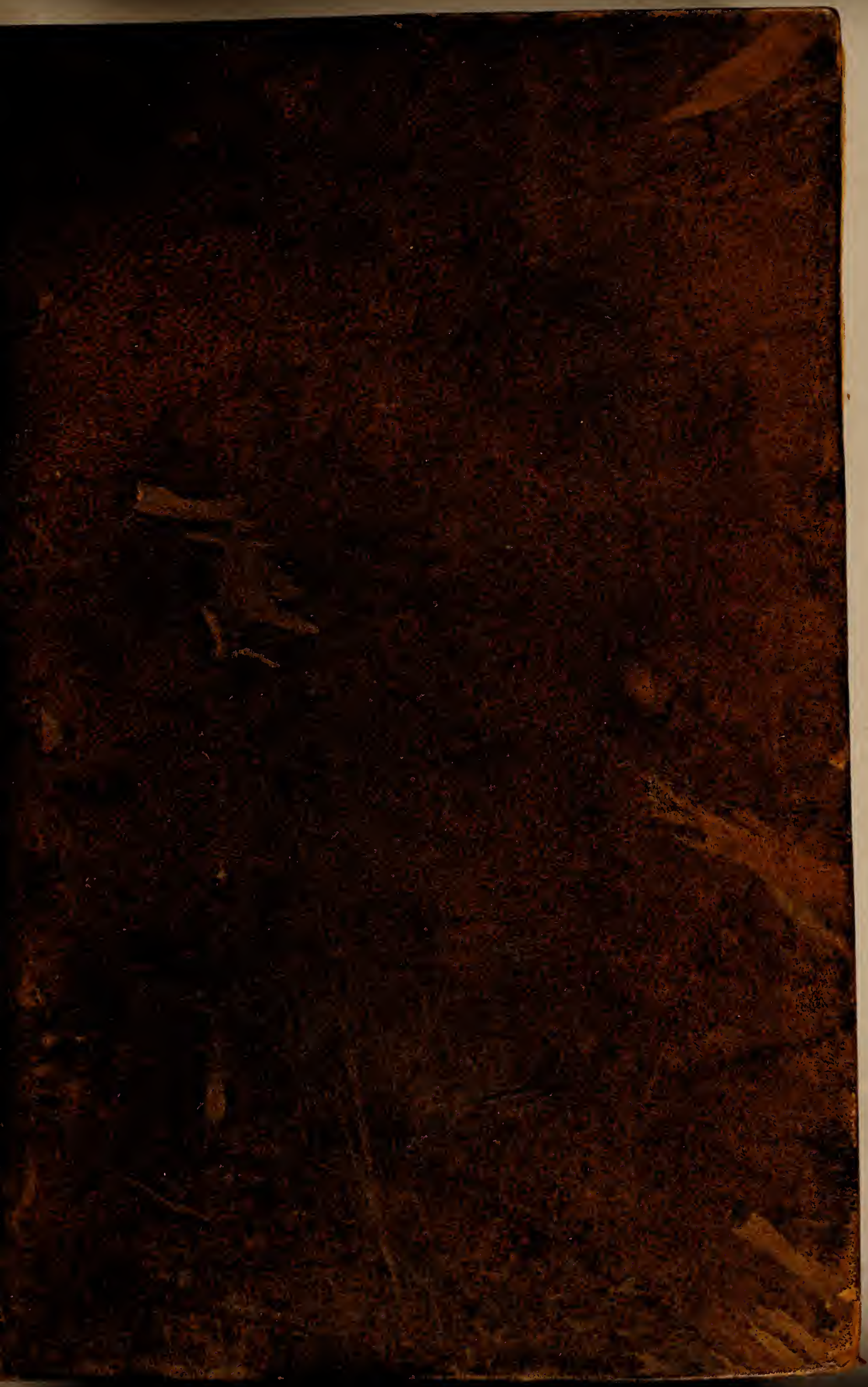

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TWENTY

SERMONS

ON THE FOLLOWING

SUBJECTS,

VIZ.

UNIVERSITY
BROWN

I. The Folly and Danger of Duplicity in Religion.

II. The Excellency of the human Soul.

III. Jeſus Chriſt the only Source of Reſt and Happineſs.

IV. The Dominion of an Omnipotent Deity a Reaſon for Joy and Praiſe.

V. VI. VII. Charity more excellent than Faith or Hope.

VIII. Chriſt preaching to the Spirits in Priſon.

IX. Redemption by the Blood of Chriſt.

X. XI. The Connection between the Duties and Comforts of Religion.

XII. The Obligations to Family-Religion.

XIII. The Uſefulneſs and Importance of Religious Education.

XIV. XV. XVI. The Table of the Lord rendered contemptible.

XVII. XVIII. Practical Obſervations on the Hiſtory of Judas and his tragical End.

XIX. Man doomed to return to the Duſt from whence he was taken.

XX. The Bleſſedneſs of thoſe who have not ſeen and yet have believed.

BY

ANDREW ELIOT, D. D.

Paſtor of a CHURCH in BOSTON.

BOSTON:

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MDCCLXXIV.

TO THE

CHURCH AND CONGREGATION

To which the AUTHOR ſtands in a

PASTORAL RELATION.

My Dear Chriſtian Friends,

IT is now more than Thirty-two Years ſince I devoted myſelf to the Service of your Souls. From that Time my Studies and Endeavors have been employed to promote your beſt Intereſts.

The mutual Affection there hath been between us during the Time of my

my Miniſtry, the Harmony and Peace which have ſubſiſted among yourſelves, and your kind Acceptance of my Labors, have been no ſmall Support and Encouragement to me, amidſt the many Difficulties and Trials which unavoidably attend the Paſtoral Charge.

In the Courſe of my Preaching, I have not meddled with abſtruſe Speculations: And, as far as Miniſterial Fidelity would allow, have avoided Subjects of Controverſy. I have rather deſired to impreſs on your Hearts and my own a deeper Senſe of thoſe great and important Truths, in which good Men are agreed, and which are at the Foundation of all Religion. Being fully perſuaded, that the Pulpit was not deſigned to be a School of Diſputation, or to diſplay a Miniſter's Acquaintance with Science falſly ſo called.

My

My chief Aim hath been to be a uſeful Preacher-----To be an Inſtrument of building you up in Faith and Holineſs unto eternal Life-----Bleſſed be God ! I have Reaſon to hope my Labors have not been wholly in vain.-------I do not mean by this, to boaſt of any peculiar Fidelity or Succeſs. I am conſcious I have not done the good I might and ought to have done.----The Imperfections which have attended my Life and Miniſtry are a conſtant Source of Humiliation and Grief-----My only Hope is in the Mercy of God through Jeſus Chriſt. May He forgive the Defects both of Preacher and Hearers !

The earneſt and repeated Deſire of a great number of you, hath brought the following Diſcourſes into public View. It was a ſufficient Reaſon with me, and I hope it will be thought ſo

by

by others, that I ſhould by the Publication gratify a kind and obliging People. At the ſame Time, I am not without hopes, that theſe Sermons which I preſent you, as a Mark of my Affection and Gratitude, may, by the Bleſſing of God, promote your ſpiritual Advantage, as well as afford you ſome Inſtruction and Entertainment. Very few of them were choſen by myſelf. Several were deſired for the Preſs immediately after the Delivery. It was more agreable to collect them into a Volume than to publiſh them ſeparately.

I am very ſenſible they will not bear a critical Inſpection, and aſk the Candor of thoſe who ſhall vouchſafe to give them the Peruſal. I pretend to no great Skill in Compoſition; and ſome Allowance will be made for the

almoſt

almoſt innumerable Avocations to which I am continually expoſed.

I the more readily complied with your Requeſt, as I am aware my Life is upon the Decline, and that I muſt ſhortly put off this Tabernacle.

I have only to requeſt for myſelf, that you would ſhew me the ſame Tenderneſs, while I abide with you, which I have hitherto experienced. And that you would continue to favor me with your Prayers, that I may be faithful to God and to your Souls, and may not, when I have preached to others, be myſelf a Caſt-away.

God forbid! that I ſhould ceaſe to pray for you, that your Love may abound yet more in Knowledge, and in all Judgment. That ye may approve

things

things that are excellent ; that ye may be ſincere, and without Offence till the Day of Chriſt: Being filled with the Fruits of of Righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt unto the Glory and Praiſe of God.

I am,

With ſincere reſpect,

Your Affectionate Friend,

And Servant in the Goſpel,

ANDREW ELIOT.

Boſton, May 20th,
1774.

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SERMON I.

The Folly and Danger of Duplicity in Religion.

JAMES I. 8.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

IF we look around and take a view of mankind; we find multitudes sunk into the lowest state of degeneracy; either immersed in vicious pleasures, or engaged in unworthy pursuits; wholly negligent of God and their most important interests.—We find a few, a very few, acting a wise and rational part, attentive to the truths of religion, and making the will of God the rule of their conduct.—Besides these, we find a third sort; who attempt to divide their hearts between God and the world; or as our Saviour expresses it, to serve God and mammon. They desire to have

their good things here and hereafter too ; to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin, and practice the duties of religion at the ſame time. In conſequence of this divided ſtate of mind, they are uncertain and inconſtant ; ſometimes for God, and ſometimes for Baal : ſometimes they ſeem to be men of religion and virtue, at other times they devote themſelves to worldly cares and pleaſures, as if there was no God, or they had no connection with him.

" A double-minded man is unſtable in all his ways."

In diſcourſing on this ſubject I ſhall endeavour

Firſt, To explain to you the character of a double-minded man.

Secondly, I ſhall conſider the inſtability of conduct which is the conſequence of ſuch a ſtate of mind.

Thirdly, I ſhall ſet before you the folly and danger of ſuch a temper and conduct.

I ſhall then conclude with a ſerious exhortation to all to devote themſelves to God, entirely and without any reſerve.

Firſt, I am to ſhew what it is to be double-minded.

We

We call that man double-minded, in our tranſactions with each other, who at one time profeſſes a warm regard and friendſhip ; at another, when perhaps we moſt need his help, is diſtant and lukewarm, diſcovers no concern for our intereſt, nor diſpoſition to ſerve us ; or if he can gain any advantage to himſelf, forſakes his friend and betrays his cauſe. Such abſolute deceit and hypocriſy, argues a mind proof againſt every virtuous conſideration. There are others who make a fair appearance, and would do ſome things to ſerve us, but are eaſily led away by an oppoſite intereſt. They do not intend to deceive us in their profeſſions of friendſhip ; but when they are in a different company, or there is a change of circumſtances, their diſpoſition alters ; their mind is divided ; they are wavering and uncertain ; not knowing how to determine, or how to act. It is in this latter ſenſe the apoſtle ſpeaks of a double-minded man in the text. He doth not intend perſons who are guilty of direct prevarication and falſhood in their profeſſions of religion, and who aſſume a character which they know doth not belong to them, with a deſign to deceive and impoſe on the world : but he ſpeaks of thoſe who are diſtracted and divided in their thoughts ; who feel at ſome times a warmth and zeal for God and the cauſe of virtue ; but at other times are languid and indifferent, give themſelves no concern, whether religion prevails in their own ſouls or the ſouls of others.—There is,

as

as critics obſerve, an antitheſis, or oppoſition between this temper and what was before ſaid of the bleſſed God; God giveth *ſimply*, or with a *ſingle mind*—but the other is *double-minded*, and deſtitute of that ſimplicity and ſteady goodneſs which God approves and enjoins; one while reſolving upon this and another upon that. The expreſſion intimates, that we profeſs a regard to God, and do ſome things in religion; but that there is ſome other intereſt which we prefer to him, or which hath at leaſt an equal place in our hearts, and which we cannot give up for his ſake. It implies, that God is at times in our thoughts, and that we have ſome faint deſires to ſecure his favor and approbation: but that our regard is not ſufficient to carry us to that entire devotedneſs to him which we profeſs to have, and which chriſtianity requires; that there are ſome things, ſome difficult duties, in the omiſſion of which we hope the Lord will pardon his ſervants, and make ſome kind allowance for our particular circumſtances, connections, and temptations.

If we had not the cleareſt evidence of this criminal duplicity, we ſhould be ready to think it impoſſible ſuch a divided ſtate of mind ſhould ever exiſt. Religion, a conformity to the whole will of God, is ſo much our duty and intereſt, that if our minds were in a right ſtate, we could not have the leaſt heſitation about any part of chriſtian practice. The bleſſed God is ſo infinitely ſuperior to every o-

ther

ther object, that we ought not to desire any thing in comparison with him. Jesus Christ is so good a friend, and hath done so much for us, that we should never think any thing too much to do for him. We should account his yoke to be easy and his burden light: and rejoice in every opportunity to testify our gratitude and esteem. But so it is; there are double minded men; scripture and experience make it too evident to be denied. It will be well, if this character doth not in some degree belong to us. 'Tis true, God deserves all our love, and if we saw things in their just light, and had no wrong bias, we should not judge or act amiss in this or any other instance. But the case is far otherwise, our minds are weak and ignorant, there is in us an evil propensity, something which makes it difficult to consider religious truths with that attention and impartiality they deserve. Our natural fondness for earthly and sensual objects darkens our understanding, perverts our judgment, and often makes things appear quite different from what they are; or quiets our minds when we know we do amiss.

The bounds which God hath fixed to the gratification of our natural inclinations are not merely arbitrary constitutions, they are fixed by infinite wisdom, and by them God designs our advantage, as well as his own honor. The law of God is the rule by which we are to govern ourselves; this law

is

is holy, juſt, and good. Reaſon and conſcience therefore urge us to comply with it's requirements; they dictate to us, theſe things ye ought to do and thoſe to leave undone; but our fleſhly appetites and inclinations too often prevail againſt reaſon and conſcience; they either ſilence this ſtill ſmall voice, or perſuade us to diſregard it.

God who is perfectly acquainted with the weakneſs and perverſeneſs of the human heart, knowing that we ſhould be likely to diſregard naked precepts, though founded in the higheſt reaſon, hath enforced his law by the moſt powerful ſanctions; ſanctions moſt wiſely adapted to operate on our hopes and fears, thoſe leading paſſions in human nature, and which if ſuitably attended to, could not fail of producing their genuine effect; but men are awfully inattentive to theſe weighty and intereſting conſiderations, they put far away the evil day, and forget God amidſt the cares and amuſements of life. They do not at once become wholly negligent of the things that belong to their peace, nor ſink into a ſtupidity ſo diſhonorable to their reaſonable nature. Conſcience gives many alarms, and ſometimes they have a lively ſenſe of the power and wrath of God; they conſider and are afraid of him.—There are none, at leaſt none under the goſpel, who have not at times a perſuaſion of the Being and Perfections of God, a view of the evil nature and dangerous conſequences of ſin, and who

do

do not ſee the neceſſity of a ſpiritual change, and an intereſt in the great atoning ſacrifice; the truths of the goſpel are impreſſed on their hearts by the Spirit of God. By embracing theſe happy ſeaſons and attending to the divine influences, thay might become good men and ſincere chriſtians; ſo that it is their own fault they are not. While their minds are thus rouſed and affected, they feel a diſreliſh for ſenſual and worldly objects; they cannot enjoy them with any degree of ſatisfaction; they ſee that theſe are not able to afford reſt to their minds; they are excited to prayer, that God would correct what is amiſs, and juſtify them freely by his grace through the redemption there is in Chriſt Jeſus.—Theſe awakenings do not prove a change of heart, they are no evidence that we love God or his ways. They ſometimes terminate happily, ſinners obtain the mercy they ſeek, and become the children of God by faith in Chriſt Jeſus—and if it is not always the caſe, it is becauſe they quench the Spirit, grow careleſs and ſecure, neglect God, and indulge to a vicious courſe. Inſtances of ſuch apoſtacy we too often ſee.

It is not without ſome ſtruggles, that any, eſpecially young perſons who have had a good education, loſe theſe impreſſions of religion. Before conſcience is ſilenced, they ſtrangely heſitate and balance, as if they were at a loſs what to do or which way to turn. Sometimes this motive prepondе-

rates,

rates, and ſometimes that, they halt between two opinions, which is in effect to have no opinion at all. A ſenſe of danger may awaken and alarm us, and put us on enquiring how we may eſcape it, but it cannot produce love to God or ſincere delight in him. Until we love God, we cannot prefer him to every thing elſe; and until we prefer him to every thing, it is not to be expected we ſhould give up every thing for his ſake. 'Tis true, ſpiritual and eternal things are infinitely more valuable than any thing this world hath to offer, but we do not ſee their worth and importance, until we have a ſpiritual taſte and reliſh, or are, as the ſcripture expreſſes it, ſpiritually minded. Beſides, the things of the world are preſent with us, while the motives of religion are fetch'd from thoſe that are future and inviſible; and every one knows that objects which are preſent ſtrike us more forcibly, than thoſe that are diſtant; though the latter are of much more worth and importance. If theſe future objects ſometimes appear real, ſo as to put us on ſeeking them, yet it is difficult to maintain a ſenſe of their reality, or to keep them conſtantly in view. And if they are real, yet their futurity is a circumſtance which prevents our attending to them as we ought. As they are future, we are ready to imagine we ſhall have time enough to think of them, and we will take ſome more convenient ſeaſon for it. We ſhall not feel the evil threatned, or partake of the good promiſed, till this life is ended; we may

may therefore purſue the world at preſent, and after ſome time provide for futurity.

It is impoſſible that men ſhould ruſh voluntarily into ruin: as much as we are attached to the pleaſures of ſenſe, we ſhould not indulge to them, if we were perſuaded that this indulgence would certainly be followed with remedileſs deſtruction, and had a clear view of that deſtruction before us. One reaſon therefore why men are divided between God and the world, is that they have ſome ſenſe of the danger of ſin, but not deep enough to conquer their inclinations to, nor to deter them from the practice of it.

Another reaſon is, that they hope by attending one duty, to atone for their neglect of another; and by avoiding ſome ſins, to make up for the practice of many others. They are taught that God is not ſtrict to mark iniquity, that he is gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger and of great kindneſs, and they flatter themſelves that he will overlook many failings in perſons who do ſo much. If they are not quite ſo righteous, ſo benevolent, ſo circumſpect as they ought to be, yet they attend ordinances, and have a great zeal for godlineſs. Or if they neglect the duties of piety, yet they wrong no one, they are ſober and temperate, they do many kind offices to their neighbours, and give alms of all they poſſeſs. This is a ſcheme finely adapted to the corruptions

of the human heart, according to which, every one may keep his own iniquity. Thus men divide their hearts between God and mammon, and vainly attempt to ſerve them both, in oppoſition to the voice of reaſon and ſcripture, which plainly teach, that we cannot ſerve two maſters, and that no one whoſe heart is thus divided hath any meaſure of ſincerity in his pretences to religion.—If I do not love God above the world and every thing in it, I do not love him at all. If I am not willing to give up all for the ſake of Chriſt, I am not his diſciple. The bleſſed God deſerves the higheſt regard, he requires the whole heart, and if any object ſhare our affection and eſteem with him, or is allowed a place in our hearts in oppoſition to him, it ſhews, that we have no true religion, whatever we profeſs. But I would not anticipate what belongs to another head. Let us,

In the ſecond place conſider the inſtability of conduct which is the natural conſequence of a divided ſtate of mind.

Where there is a ſettled principle of action, whether it be good or bad, the courſe of life will be correſpondent. The man who hath his heart ſet on this world, and who chuſes to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin, keeps this point in view, and ſteadily purſues that which is the object of his choice. He endeavours to ſuppreſs the dictates of conſcience, and to overcome

overcome the fears and objections which arise in his mind. He is uniform; he is earnest to reach the mark he aims at.—On the other hand, one who hath a supreme love to God, and sincerely devoted himself to his service, hath a stedfast permanent principle, that influences all his conduct. He considers himself as always in the presence of God, and when tempted to sin, cries out with the holy Patriarch, "how shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God!" This principle of divine love is also a powerful stimulus to right practice, and gently constrains to holy obedience. A christian's highest ambition is to be like Him who is the greatest and the best of Beings. His most earnest desire is to serve and glorify Him who hath laid him under the strongest obligations. His most raised expectations are of enjoying Him, who is the inexhaustible source of all good. These hopes are strengthened by the experience he hath of the pleasure which attends the practice of holiness in this life.—This pleasure, though greatly interrupted, and mingled with a thousand doubts and fears, doth yet far exceed all the pleasures of sin, and sometimes arises to joy unspeakable and full of glory. All this delight a christian considers as only a small prelibation of that fulness of joy, which the gospel allows him to hope for through Jesus Christ.—You cannot wonder that one who is possessed of such principles, who believes the truth of religion, and hath such joyful expectations, is fixed and determined in his course of action; that he is in the language

of

of the apoſtle, "ſtedfaſt, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

But a man whoſe mind is perpetually fluctuating between God and the world, and cannot determine which to prefer, will always be wavering and unſteady in his practice; he will turn this way or that according to the motive which happens at the time to be predominant. "Unſtable as water, he cannot excell." His character, like his conduct, is dubious and uncertain, you cannot well pronounce him a man of the world, and certainly he is not a chriſtian. Chriſt will not own him to be a diſciple, and he is miſtaken if he thinks favourably of himſelf. As the apoſtle ſpeaks of thoſe who are deſtitute of charity, one of ſuch a fickle inconſtant mind is *nothing*; he is nothing in the ſight of God; he hath no real worth and excellency; he is truly odious, and juſtly contemptible; and in ſuch a divided ſtate of mind he can do nothing to any purpoſe. He cannot give himſelf an unbounded latitude in vice, becauſe he retains ſome belief of the being and perfections of God, and fears to diſpleaſe and offend him. He hath ſo much ſenſe of religion, that he is at times very ſerious and thoughtful, wiſhes he could be a chriſtian, is willing to do ſome things which God requires, and reſolves to repent and reform; but when he meets his vain companions, hath a ſudden proſpect of great gain, or of gratifying ſome favorite inclination, the temptation

tion is too ſtrong, he is led away and enticed. Sometimes he is watchful and circumſpect, devout and regular, and ſeems to be a man of piety and virtue; at other times, the world engroſſes his heart, and he is overwhelmed in the cares and pleaſures of it. One day, he ſees the importance of religion, and determines to make it the great buſineſs of life; another, he is forgetful of God, and behaves as if there was no life after this. At one time you ſee him profeſſing a zeal for God, and making a ſhew of ſanctity; at another indulging himſelf in practices directly contrary to all the rules of the goſpel of Chriſt.

Such an inconſiſtency of conduct is not always owing to a formed deſign to impoſe on the world. Theſe religious appearances are not abſolute hypocriſy and deceit. Theſe men often think themſelves better than they are, and intend to be what they profeſs. But their hearts deceive them, becauſe they have no acquaintance with the tranſforming energy of divine truth—they have no ſettled principle of action to govern them, and to oppoſe to the temptations with which they are aſſaulted, and ſo are eaſily overcome. Their hearts are not "right with God", and therefore they are "not ſtedfaſt in his covenant".

III. Let us now in the third place conſider the folly and danger of ſuch a temper and conduct as I have deſcribed. If

If there was no other conſideration than the anxiety and uneaſineſs which a fickle irreſolute temper neceſſarily produces ; methinks this ſhould determine and ſettle us. The double-minded man is " like the troubled ſea, which cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and dirt." Or as it is expreſſed in the context, " He that wavereth is like a wave of the ſea, driven with the wind and toſſed." " Thoſe imperfect and undetermined impreſſions of religion which he feels, ſerve rather to perplex and torment, than guide and ſecure him." The ſenſe he has of divine things will not ſuffer him to be eaſy and at reſt in a vicious courſe ; but is not ſufficient to produce that peace and quietneſs which is the genuine effect of true religion. He is ever ſinning and repenting, reſolving and breaking his good reſolutions. A man thus torn and diſtracted muſt doubtleſs be very miſerable. He enjoys no comfort here, he can have no rational proſpect of happineſs hereafter. For whatever ſhew ſuch men make of religion, they are ſtrangers to God and the ſervants of ſin. " Let not that man" ſays the apoſtle, " think that he ſhall receive any thing of the Lord."

In matters perfectly indifferent, a man may chuſe this or that, or he may heſitate and prefer neither, and yet be ſafe. But this is not the caſe in matters of religion ; here is no ſuch thing as neutrality. God requires the heart, he demands our time, our talents,

talents, and he will admit of no competitor ; the nature of the thing admits of none. God is our rightful Lord and Sovereign, there is a neceſſary relation between him and us ; from whence reſults an unavoidable obligation upon us to love, obey and ſerve him. He neceſſarily requires us to be holy as he is holy. Now every one is holy, or he is not. He loves God, or he doth not. There is no medium. The holineſs of the beſt is not perfect ; in our preſent imperfect ſtate, who is there that doeth good and ſinneth not ? But when the mind is determined for God, and we ſincerely aim at a conformity to his nature and will, without any limitation or exception, we are holy according to the gracious tenor of the goſpel of Chriſt.

This holineſs doth not conſiſt merely in an abſtinence from groſs ſin, or an external or partial obedience to the commands of Chriſt. It is an inward principle. It ſuppoſes that we have a ſupreme regard to the Lord our Maker. That we love the work as well as the reward. That our obedience is free and unconſtrained, and that we can chearfully obey all his commandments. All who have not this inward principle of holineſs are the " ſervants of corruption." Some are more abject ſlaves than others, but all are more or leſs in ſubjection. It is not our having good thoughts now and then, nor our purpoſing that we will ſome time or another become the ſervants of God ; nor our reſolving on the preſent time,

and

and doing ſome things that are right and fit in conſequence of ſuch reſolutions, that will prove us to be holy ; unleſs we determine to change every bad habit, to leave every wicked practice, and to make the will of God our only rule. It is not the laying a reſtraint on our luſts for a time, or being almoſt perſuaded to be chriſtians, that will conſtitute us heirs of the promiſes. So much as to heſitate in ſo plain and important a caſe ſhews the prevalency of our corruptions, and that ſin hath dominion over us. "Their heart is divided ; now ſhall they be found faulty".* Such as theſe will have no advantage of their temporary reſolutions and partial reformations. They will be accounted and treated as children of diſobedience. Would an earthly prince look upon a rebel ſubject, with approbation ? Would he receive him into favor, reward and honor him, becauſe he had ſome thoughts of returning to his duty, which he never put in execution ? Or becauſe he heſitated a great while and never came to a concluſion ? Would not his irreſolution in a cauſe where his duty was ſo plain, be an additional affront ; and aggravate rather than extenuate his guilt ?

Irreſolution produces delay, and delays in this caſe are exceeding dangerous, becauſe this is the only time of our probation, and this time may be very ſhort. Nothing is more uncertain than the life

* Hoſ. 10. 2.

life of man. We know not what a day, what an hour, what a moment may bring forth; as death leaves us judgment will find us, which will determine our ſtate forever. There is no time after this life, to correct any miſtakes we have made during our continuance here. It is therefore of infinite conſequence that we die well. Every time we put off this important concern, we do, for ought we know, conſign ourſelves to everlaſting deſtruction; becauſe if we die, during this delay, this will be the certain conſequence. It will not avail, that we always deſigned to ſet about this great work, this only ſhews that we were convinced of it's neceſſity; and of conſequence, that in delaying, we have acted againſt the light of our own minds. If we neglect the preſent time, we know not that we ſhall have any other. We ought not therefore to heſitate a moment, but to ſet about the work of repentance immediately; we ſhould make haſte, and make no delay, to keep the commandments of God. If there was any doubt what was our duty, or what was our intereſt, our conduct might admit of ſome excuſe. But in ſo great, ſo neceſſary a work, upon which an eternity depends, irreſolution is a crime; it is a crime which carries it's own puniſhment with it, in that diſquietude it neceſſarily occaſions, and which expoſes to greater miſery than we can now conceive of.

I am to conclude with a ſerious exhortation to all, to give their hearts to God wholly and with-

out any reſerve. And here I obſerve in the firſt place,—Religion is not a fiction. You have ſufficient evidence of the great truths on which it is founded. An heathen poet once ſaid, Fear firſt made Gods: and others have repreſented religion as the contrivance of ſome cunning politician. There is no leſs folly than impiety in theſe wild aſſertions. The being of God is capable of demonſtration. "The inviſible things of God are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," and he who can believe, that all things came into ſuch a ſtate as we find them in, by mere chance, or without counſel and deſign, is prepared to deny firſt principles, and to hold both ſides of a contradiction.

If there is a God, if he is ſuch a holy wiſe and good Being, as he is repreſented to be, he cannot be an unconcerned ſpectator of the conduct of moral agents. He muſt will their conformity to himſelf, and his own holy nature. He muſt be diſpleaſed with thoſe who oppoſe his will by acting contrary to it. He muſt be pleaſed with thoſe who love, ſerve and obey him. He muſt be diſpoſed to puniſh the one, and reward the other. I own, upon the principles of what is called natural religion, we cannot determine that God will reward a creature who hath deviated from the path of duty, as it is evident all the children of Adam, capable of

of moral action, have done. Here, revelation comes to our help. We are told, how God may be juſt, and yet juſtify the ſinner who believes in Jeſus.—I go on therefore to ſay,

The revelation we have of God and of his will is the truth. We run no hazard in truſting to it, and in venturing the ſalvation of our ſouls upon it. The evidence of this revelation reſts on the perfections of God. It would be no way conſiſtent with the natural notions we have of God, to ſuffer ſuch things to be done in favor of a falſe religion, as makes the aſſent of an honeſt and enquiring mind reaſonable, if not neceſſary. The chriſtian religion is from God. All the doctrines and precepts of it are divine. The more we examine them, the more do we ſee of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in them. We are not called to follow cunningly deviſed fables. The goſpel delivers the words of truth and ſoberneſs. We are required to believe nothing, but what we ſee reaſon to believe; and to do nothing, but what it is right and fit we ſhould do. "He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" God requires of us to believe in his Son; to repent of our ſins; to be holy in all manner of converſation. For our excitement, he promiſes the moſt glorious rewards to him who believes, repents, and obeys the goſpel;

and

and threatens the moſt amazing puniſhments to the wicked and ungodly. In the one, we ſee his infinite grace; in the other, we behold his awful juſtice; and in both, we ſee how wiſely the ſanctions of his goſpel are calculated to produce obedience to it. Men, under the government of their luſts, are apt to form objections againſt the degree of the puniſhment threatned; and they ſometimes almoſt perſuade themſelves, that God will not execute his threatnings. We eaſily believe what we wiſh may be true. But how little effect would any puniſhment ſhort of what is threatned have upon men, when even theſe threatnings are in ſo many inſtances ineffectual?

If there is a future ſtate, if we are probationers for that ſtate, and muſt be miſerable or happy, according to our behavior in this ſtate of trial, religion is a moſt ſerious buſineſs, and we ought diligently to attend to the arguments and motives which the goſpel preſents. God allows us to examine the nature and evidences of that which is propoſed to us for our belief and practice; to weigh all that can be ſaid on both ſides, and to act agreably to what appears to us to be right and fit. We are directed to prove all things. If upon inquiry, you find chriſtianity to be true, as if you examine with any meaſure of ſerioufneſs, you undoubtedly will, you cannot but own, it is reaſonable you ſhould form your faith and practice by it.

If

If religion is a reaſonable ſervice, why do you halt between two opinions ? Why do you not with ſerioufneſs and diligence engage in it ? If it be not, gratify your luſts without controul, walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes. We are willing to join iſſue with you here ; let it all turn on this point. This is not becauſe we look upon it as a matter of indifference how you determine, we think it far otherwiſe : but becauſe we are perſuaded the religion of Chriſt will bear examining ; the more carefully and ſeriouſly it is look'd into, the more it will approve itſelf to the reaſon of man.

Is it not reaſonable, that you ſhould ſerve the God who made you ? Is it not reaſonable, that you ſhould conſecrate all the powers of your ſouls to him who gave you theſe powers ? who hath ſent his Son to redeem you, from that ſtate of ſin and guilt into which you were ſunk ? and who hath ſo greatly diſtinguiſhed you by committing to you the oracles of God ? Is it not reaſonable, you ſhould be accountable for the talents with which you are entruſted ? Ought you not often to think of the account you are to give to him ? Are not the ſanctions with which the law of God is guarded worthy your attention ? Is it not fit, your fears ſhould be alarmed with the threatning of utter deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord ? and your hopes raiſed by the proſpect of a glorious immortality ?

Ought

Ought you not to be ſollicitous to avoid the one, and attain to the other ? I am perſuaded you muſt anſwer each of theſe inquiries in the affirmative. Why then are you at all irreſolute ? Why do you waver and heſitate what is to be done ? Why do you fluctuate this way and that, as if you were in doubt which way to turn ? It is not, my brethren, becauſe you are at any uncertainty what is your duty, or what is your intereſt. It is becauſe your luſts are too prevalent, and you are governed by ſenſe, and not by reaſon. Your mind and conſcience condemn you. There is not one of you, who doth not in his ſober hours wiſh he could act otherwiſe. There is not one of you, unleſs he is hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, who doth not determine to alter his courſe of life before he dies. Some of you are perhaps almoſt perſuaded, but you cannot find reſolution enough to bid adieu to your luſts, to reſign yourſelves wholly to Chriſt, and to live as the goſpel obliges you to live. And ſo you are continually fluctuating between God and the devil; and undetermined whether to chuſe life or death. Was it a much leſs danger, was you in hazard of loſing only your temporal life, or any valuable intereſt in this world, he muſt be deſtitute of chriſtian benevolence, who ſhould not immediately give the alarm. You will not wonder then, that your friends, that your miniſters, cry aloud, when they ſee you in danger of loſing your ſouls. Compaſſion to your ſouls, yea compaſſion to their

own,

own, obliges them to do all they can, to ſave you from impending ruin.

You allow what we call upon you to do, is neceſſary to be done. And if ſo, what time ſo good as the preſent? It muſt be done one time or another; all the time you delay, you make the work ſo much the more difficult. One reaſon you find it ſo hard now, is becauſe you have defer'd it ſo long; and is not the difficulty likely to increaſe, the longer you defer it?—But, I beſeech you, conſider, are you ſure of having any other opportunity? Moſt certainly you are not. And will you delay a work which is neceſſary to be done, and which you may have no other opportunity of doing?—If you die in your ſins, you are undone for ever. Poſſibly, this is the only time you may have to repent. And ſurely the poſſibility of this, ſhews the folly of making any delay; you run a dreadful venture, every moment you neglect this important intereſt. Be earneſt with God to grant you the influences of his Spirit, to ſanctify and change you. You have ſpent a great deal of time in vanity and folly, your thoughts have been imploy'd in contrivances to gratify your appetites and paſſions. You have been enquiring how you ſhould be rich and great in this world. Thus you have been dead, while you have lived, dead to all rational purpoſes of living. Tis time to awake out of ſleep. You have a great deal of work to do, and very

very difficult work.—For though the ways of religion are juſtly ſtiled ways of pleaſantneſs and all her paths peace, yet it has its difficulties. Chriſt's yoke is eaſy, but it is a yoke, it is a reſtraint, which will occaſion many ſtruggles and conflicts. The entrance on the ſervice of Chriſt is attended with peculiar difficulties, eſpecially to thoſe who have indulged vicious habits, and been children of diſobedience. Oh ! therefore loſe no time, be no longer unſtable and wavering, conſent to no parley ; but ſtrive to enter into the ſtrait gate, and to walk in the narrow way which leadeth unto life. Your obtaining an intereſt in the favor of God depends on his mercy and grace ; you have reaſon to hope from the goodneſs of his nature, from the merits of Chriſt, and from the gracious declarations of the goſpel, that if you ſeek you ſhall find ; but if you will not hear, if you will go on to treaſure up wrath againſt the day of wrath, you muſt periſh, there is no help.

In particular, let me beſeech you, my young friends, to begin with God. Devote your ſprightly powers and the vigor of youth to his ſervice. This will be an unſpeakable advantage to you if you die young, and will afford you great comfort if you live to be old. On all accounts the preſent is the beſt time you can have to enter on a religious courſe ; you are now moſt ſuſceptible of good impreſſions ; you will have leſs interruption from the

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cares of the world, and your early piety will be peculiarly acceptable to God. Whereas, if you indulge to vice, while you are young, you will gradually lose your tenderness of mind, and God may be provoked to take his Holy Spirit from you. Be persuaded then no longer to hesitate, but give your hearts to God now, while it is an accepted time and a day of salvation.

As to those who are advanced in years, and have grown old in sin, I fear, I greatly fear, all exhortations will be lost on them.—If your minds had not been blinded by the God of this world; and you had not contracted a great degree of hardness and stupidity, you had not stood it out to this day, against the warnings and exhortations with which God hath favoured you—Your case is exceeding dangerous, it may not be desperate. But surely you have no time to deliberate, whether you will comply with the calls of God or not. If you defer your repentance now, in all probability you defer it forever. Submit to Christ, before it be too late; the young find it difficult to renounce the pleasures of sin, and to make the entire surrender of themselves to God; you, who have confirmed habits of sin, may expect still greater opposition. But the more difficult the work, so much the greater reason is there for earnestness, activity and diligence.

To conclude, Let us all make religion our buſineſs. Indifference and inſtability, in an affair of ſuch importance, are greatly criminal, and will juſtly render us contemptible in the ſight of God and man.—It is worthy all our attention and it requires it—it is no eaſy matter to govern our luſts and paſſions, our affections and appetites; to live above this preſent evil world, while we live in it, and have ſo much to do with it.—Let us then be watchful and circumſpect; and conſcious of our weakneſs, and liableneſs to be led aſtray, let us be much in prayer to God for his all-conquering grace. We are weak in ourſelves, but we can do all things through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth us.

SERMON

SERMON II.

The Excellency of the human Soul.

GENESIS II. 7.

And man became a living ſoul.

IN the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He ſpake and it was done, he commanded and it ſtood faſt. "God ſaid, let there be light, and there was light."—But the creation of man is introduced in a manner peculiarly adapted to awaken our attention. "And God ſaid, let us make man after our image." This manner of expreſſion was deſigned to intimate, not, that God took any time to deliberate on this part of his work; not, that He had occaſion for the aſſiſtance of any other being; but only the ſuperiority of man to the inanimate and animal creation, of which an account had been given before. "The Lord God formed man of the

duſt

duſt of the ground, and breathed into his noſtrils the breath of life, and man became a living ſoul." Theſe words evidently teach us, that man is conſtituted of two diſtinct parts, a body and a ſoul; and point out the groſs compoſition of the one, and the pure ſpiritual nature of the other. Theſe ſubſtances, ſo eſſentially different, are by the power of God wonderfully united.

The body only is viſible, and is admirably fitted to anſwer the end for which it is deſigned. It much excells the bodies which are given to the other creatures of God on this earth. We are, to uſe the words of the inſpired pſalmiſt, " fearfully and wonderfully made." The perfection of parts in our bodies, their ſymmetry and proportion, their coaleſcence and agreement, render them both comely and convenient. But ſtill the body is but a beautiful piece of clay; " there is a ſpirit in man," which communicates life and motion, " and the inſpiration of the Almighty hath given him underſtanding." " The body without the ſpirit is dead." —This ſpirit or ſoul is every where in ſcripture repreſented as ſuperior to the body; as ſomething excellent in it's kind, and highly to be valued. Agreably, my deſign at this time is,

Firſt, To diſcourſe of the excellency of the human ſoul. And then,

Secondly,

Secondly, To make thoſe practical remarks, to which the ſubject naturally leads us.

Firſt, I am to diſcourſe of the excellency of the human ſoul.

By the excellency of the ſoul, I intend it's original ſuperiority to the other creatures of God in this lower world, or to the body with which it is united. For, in its preſent ſtate, even the contemplation of our ſouls will lead to many humbling conſiderations. "Nothing," as one obſerves, "is ſo great, nothing ſo worthy admiration as man, when we conſider him only in one point of light: Nothing appears ſo low, ſo worthy pity and contempt, when we conſider him in another. —If we look with attention on thoſe marvellous faculties, with which the Creator hath endued us; we may, with ſome appearance of reaſon, aſſume an air of grandeur, and account ourſelves among the moſt perfect and happy creatures: But when we place ourſelves in another ſituation, and caſt our eyes on our weakneſſes, our foibles and follies, nothing can appear more deſpicable than ourſelves; nothing more humbling than for us to know that we are human creatures."

We are called at preſent to view the bright ſide of the ſubject, to conſider the excellency of the human ſoul; we cannot do this, without obſerving many

many of thoſe humiliating circumſtances, which ought to be ever before us.

In order to evidence the excellency of the ſoul of man, let us conſider it's nature—it's powers—it's capacity of happineſs—the eternal duration for which it is deſigned—to which I may add, the great things God hath done to make it happy.

1. We begin with the nature of that ſoul or ſpirit there is in man.

My deſign is not to enter on any nice and philoſophical inquiry, concerning the difference there is in ſubſtances, or in what this difference conſiſts. The moſt learned ſage is as ignorant in theſe points, as an illiterate peaſant: After his moſt laboured diſquiſitions, he only darkens counſel by words without knowledge, and to which he ſcarce fixes any ideas; or if he hath ideas himſelf, he doth not communicate any to others.

How much are we at a loſs, when we contemplate this eſſential part of ourſelves! We can rather ſay what it is not, than what it is. It is ſomething diſtinct from the body, though cloſely united to it; and may be ſeparated from it. We call it a ſpiritual immaterial ſubſtance; by which we intend, that it is not the object of our ſenſes, as the body is; it hath

hath no length, breadth or thickneſs.—It animates the body, and is the ſource of all vital action. While it continues united to the tabernacle of clay, *that* derives a luſtre from it, and is exalted above all the creatures that exiſt on this earth. But when this union is diſſolved, the body is ſoon reduced to putrefaction and rottenneſs, which ſhows that the ſoul is not only different from, but ſuperior to the body. The ſcripture, which is our ſafeſt rule, teaches us to call this ſoul a ſpirit, and that it hath all the properties of a ſpirit. In this reſpect, man partakes of the nature of Angels, thoſe ſuperior Beings, who are ever in the preſence of God, and do his commandments: "Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits?" Yea more, I ſpeak it with humble reverence, he partakes in a meaſure of the nature of God, the greateſt and the beſt of Beings. "God is a ſpirit." The glorious God, when he created man, ſtamped his own divine image upon him, and gave him ſome impreſs of the Deity. He was a moral agent, capable of acting right, and of intellectual ſpiritual enjoyments. Man was made ſuperior to the creatures around him, not only in his body, which was of a more noble conſtruction than theirs; but he was eſpecially ſuperior in his ſoul, which was allied to the Creator, and capable of converſing with him. But the beſt idea we can form of the human ſoul, is from the conſideration of it's various properties and qualities. Which leads me,

In

In the ſecond place, To argue the excellency of the ſoul, from the powers and faculties with which it is endowed.

It hath underſtanding, will, and affections. It is capable of thought and reflection. It forms ideas, connects them together, and compares them with each other. It judges of fitneſs and unfitneſs; it deliberates, chuſes and determines. It remembers what hath paſſed, and approves or diſapproves, according as we have acted right or wrong. It can by imagination tranſport itſelf into the moſt diſtant climes, take into it's view all future ages by a quick ſucceſſion of ideas, and fetch delight from the moſt diſtant periods. It hath deſires and hopes to which nothing finite is equal; it forms ſome juſt notions of the great God, and hath a capacity of loving him, of rejoicing in his love, and of the eternal enjoyment of him. Theſe faculties of the ſoul, excellent as they are, are capable of continual enlargement. The very exerciſe of them tends to enlarge them. The more we think, the more capable we are of thinking, and our knowlege may be increaſing to eternity. The other powers of the mind, follow the underſtanding, and by reaſon of uſe, they make proportionate advances. By this exerciſe of it's powers, the ſoul would gradually grow wiſer and better, in a perpetual progreſſion towards perfection. If indeed, we conſider man as ſin hath made him, the faculties of the ſoul are greatly

greatly weakened and depraved; he ſees things as it were in a falſe mirror, by means of which they appear quite otherwiſe than they are; good appears evil, and evil good. In conſequence of this wrong judgment, the will chuſes perverſly, and the affections are placed on objects unworthy of them. But I ſpeak of the ſoul, as it is in itſelf, and as it came out of the creating hands of God; and bleſſed be his name, the mediation of Chriſt makes way for it's reſtoration to a ſuperior ſtate of light and purity, to that it loſt by ſin. Man is again by grace made like to God, and capable of being happy with him. Which leads me to obſerve,

Thirdly, The capacity which the ſoul of man hath of happineſs.

As man is made with ſuch noble powers, ſo he is capable of a ſuperior degree of happineſs. The animal creation can have only animal or ſenſual pleaſures. The mind of man hath a capacity for more rational and ſublime enjoyments. He is a reaſonable creature, and was deſigned for pleaſures of an intellectual nature. He was formed to contemplate on the nature and perfections of God; to obſerve the power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, diſcovered in the works of God, and to act agreably to the notices he ſhould, from time to time, have of what God required of him. This was the law of his nature, and if man had acted agreably to this law, he would

have been happy. The knowlege of God, and a conformity to his nature and will, conſtitute the happineſs of a reaſonable creature. This leads to a ſtate of quiet and reſt which nothing elſe can afford. 'Tis true, while ſoul and body are ſo cloſely connected, the wants of the body neceſſarily affect the mind, and render it uneaſy; the mind therefore cannot but be ſo far pleaſed with ſenſual gratifications, as it is thereby delivered from uneaſineſs. Nor is it ſinful to gratify our ſenſes, provided we keep within reaſonable bounds, and aim at rendering ourſelves hereby, more capable of ſerving God, which was all man would have aimed at, if he had not departed from God.—But theſe ſenſual gratifications are no way ſufficient to give reſt to the human mind; and we ſhall always find ourſelves miſtaken, if we look for happineſs from them. The deſires of our ſouls are infinite; no created good can ſatisfy them. We therefore ſee the men of this world are ever preſſing after ſomething further, they whoſe acquiſitions are greateſt, are reſtleſs and uneaſy, as they are who have nothing. The reaſon is, this world is no way calculated to fill our minds, or to make them eaſy and happy. There is an emptineſs in all worldly enjoyments, when compared with the deſires of our ſouls. "There is," as the wiſe man ſpeaks, "no good in them", no ſolid, ſubſtantial, ſatiſfying good. The pſalmiſt was obliged to repair to God as the only ſatisfying portion; "Whom have I in heaven but thee, there is none on earth I deſire beſides thee." Being capable of knowing God,

God, of contemplating, and imitating, his glorious perfections, the ſoul finds that happineſs which it in vain expects any where elſe. And how great muſt this bleſſedneſs be ! Nothing but the ſatisfaction of it's deſires can yield happineſs to any creature ; the deſires of the ſoul are vaſtly large ; if theſe deſires are ſatisfied, the happineſs which will be the conſequence hereof will be inconceivably great.

How excellent and noble muſt that ſpirit be, which is capable of deriving ſo great happineſs from the Deity ! Man was made capable of this felicity when he came out of the creating hands of God. He might have ſecured an unalienable title to it. He forfeited all pretenſions to favor by tranſgreſſing the law of his Maker. In conſequence of the ſin of man, the human frame was weakened and diſordered : He who was before innocent and happy, became a depraved and guilty creature : He could not think of God without horror, becauſe he could think of him only as an enemy.

Through Chriſt, proviſion is made for our admiſſion to a greater degree of happineſs, than Adam would have had a title to, according to the conſtitution he was placed under, even though he had not ſinned. God hath taken occaſion from the ſin of man, to glorify the riches of his mercy and goodneſs.

Fourthly

Fourthly, Another thing, which tends to give us an exalted idea of the human ſoul, is the eternal duration for which it is deſigned.

Philoſophers tell us, that the ſoul of man is a ſimple, uncompounded ſubſtance, that it is in it's nature indiviſible, and incorruptible, and hath no tendency to a diſſolution: And from it's immateriality, they argue it's natural immortality. Whatever force there may be in this argument, it is too nice and abſtruſe for every one's capacity, and muſt leave the moſt in a ſtate of uncertainty and doubt.—It is a ſuppoſition quite as agreable to reaſon; that every creature depends on God, for it's continuance in being, and capacity of acting. If He then ſhould withdraw his influence, the ſoul would ceaſe to be. God is the only independent Being; there can be no other.—But though the ſoul is entirely dependent on God, it is independent on any other. No one elſe hath power over it, to put it out of exiſtence, or deſtroy it's activity. "Fear not them," ſays our Lord," which kill the body, but are not able to kill the ſoul: But rather fear him which is able to deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell."

If this be the true ſtate of the caſe, that the ſoul hath ſuch an abſolute dependence on God; we cannot with certainty prove it's immortality, in any way, but by his expreſs declarations. Our faith in this doctrine muſt reſt wholly on divine revelation.

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If God hath declared that the ſoul ſhall eternally exiſt; it is of no importance, whether we can prove by reaſon and philoſophy, the ſoul to be immortal or not. There is no doubt but God can continue it in exiſtence. The only queſtion then is, what ſaith the ſcripture? and this is ſo clear, that it can admit of no diſpute. "Life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel." Says the apoſtle Paul, "As in Adam all die, ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive." * This is ſpoken of as the great promiſe of the goſpel, "This is the promiſe he hath promiſed us, even eternal life." † This bleſſed hope of a glorious immortality is ſet before the righteous for their quickening and encouragement. But a future ſtate of exiſtence is not confined to them. All, both good and bad, are repreſented in our Saviour's deſcription of the laſt judgment, as appearing before the Son of man; and as a concluſion of the whole it is ſaid, "Theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment, but the righteous into life eternal." ‡ The truth is, by the mediation of Chriſt, mankind are again put on their probation, and their future ſtate will be determined according to the things done in the body—all will be raiſed, both good and bad, but the one "to everlaſting life," the other "to ſhame and everlaſting contempt."

And hence it is, if I may ſo ſpeak, that there is ſuch a conteſt between heaven and hell, God and the

* 1 Cor. 15. 22. † 1 John 2. 25. ‡ Mat. 25. 46.

the Devil, about the ſoul of man. The great God, in his infinite goodneſs and grace, hath conſulted our eternal well-being, and uſes a variety of means to effect it.—On the other hand, Satan is unwearied in his attempts to ruin us. Surely it muſt be a prize of ſome worth and value, which thus engages the attention of both worlds. This will appear more fully if we conſider,

Fifthly, The great things God hath done to make our ſpirits happy.

He not only made man with a capacity of happineſs at firſt; but he placed him under ſuch circumſtances, as would be likely to ſecure it. He ſet before him ſuch arguments and motives, as were adapted to influence a reaſonable creature to that obedience, upon which his happineſs was made to depend. And when man had ungratefully broken through all the obligations he was under, and had rebelled againſt his Maker; God did not inflict upon him that puniſhment which he juſtly deſerved; He conceived thoughts of mercy; and contrived that wonderful ſcheme for his redemption, which is the admiration of Angels. He ſent his own Son in our nature, to ſuffer and to die, that he might reconcile a guilty world to himſelf, and purchaſe eternal ſalvation for us. He ſent his holy Spirit, to create us in Chriſt Jeſus to good works, and make us meet for the inheritance of the ſaints

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in light. He hath favoured us with a revelation of his mind and will, which is able to make us wiſe unto ſalvation, through faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus. He ſends his miniſters, who are to exert all their ſkill and ability, to perſuade us to accept his offered grace. He condeſcends to beſeech us to be reconciled to God—He hath inſtituted ordinances to carry on this great deſign. He hath ſet before us promiſes and threatnings, to operate on our hopes and fears, thoſe leading paſſions in human nature. —It is not eaſy to conceive, how God could have done more than he hath done to make us happy, unleſs he had taken away the freedom of our wills, and compelled us to that, which he deſigned ſhould be our own choice. Can any one think God would have done all this, if the ſoul of man had not been exceeding precious ?

It is this—it is the ſoul—which gives us a dignity in the creation of God, and makes us in any meaſure conſiderable—Not that we have any great matter to boaſt, or to be proud of ; we have, 'tis true, a place among the creatures that are called rational ; but we are, perhaps, the loweſt that come under that character ; we know ſomething, but how little, in compariſon with what we do not know ! —When we compare ourſelves with the Angels, and conſider the wiſdom and greatneſs of thoſe excellent creatures, which we may gather from the account given of them in ſcripture, how vaſtly inferior

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are we to them ! We were made like, but not equal to them. But how do we ſink into nothing, when we compare ourſelves with the glorious God, who is infinite in thoſe perfections, of which he hath communicated but a ſmall degree to us !

Theſe humbling conſiderations, would have been ſuitable for man in his original ſtate of knowlege, innocence,and happineſs ; much more now he hath ſo greatly debaſed and diſhonored himſelf by ſin ; ſo as to be far inferior to what he originally was. We were made but little lower than the Angels ; but little lower in the rank of beings, and in our capacities and endowments. But by ſin, we have loſt our nearneſs to the Angels,and are become like the beaſts which periſh.—We have no reaſon then to think highly of ourſelves : But yet we ought to ſet a great value on our own ſouls.—'Tis the immortal ſoul makes us what we are, creatures capable of rational purſuits, and everlaſting happineſs ; capable of knowing God, of partaking of his likeneſs, and enjoying that good which flows from him. Whatever rank we bear in the creation of God, how mean ſoever we are in the eſtimation of ſuperior Beings, yet our ſouls are to us of infinite worth. They are ourſelves—they are all in our make and conſtitution, that is of any value ; and they are made for eternity. It is therefore of infinite conſequence to us, that we ſecure the well being of our ſouls ; becauſe, if they are gone, all is gone as to us. If our ſouls are unhappy, we are unhappy, for

the ſoul is the man. I therefore repeat what I juſt obſerved, that to us, our ſouls are of infinite value. They would be ſo, if they were much meaner than they are—and however low man is, when compared with the infinite God, or with the Angels, or even with what he himſelf once was, or was deſigned to be; yet God hath put a dignity upon human nature, by what he hath done for our advantage; by the pains he hath taken, and the coſt he hath been at, ſpeaking of him after the manner of men, to make us happy and bleſſed.

IMPROVEMENT.

Firſt, We are led to reflect with gratitude on the goodneſs of God, who hath given us theſe ſpirits, and endowed them with ſuch powers and faculties as they are poſſeſſed of.

God is our Creator; He is the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our ſpirits; he not only animated the body which was before only duſt; but the ſoul he united to it, was capable of reaſon and tho't, of underſtanding and willing, of loving and enjoying. "There is a ſpirit in man, and the inſpiration of the Almighty giveth them underſtanding." Whatever advantage we have in our make and conſtitution, if in any thing we excel the other creatures (and moſt certainly, we have more wiſdom than the beaſts of the field, and more underſtanding than the fowles of heaven) it is God

who maketh us to differ, and we have nothing but what we have received from him. He gave us our being, and he gave us ſuch a being as we have: When therefore we take a view of ourſelves, conſider the nature and capacity of our ſpirits, the happineſs we are fitted for, and the great things God hath done that we might poſſeſs it; how can we forbear crying out with the devout pſalmiſt, "bleſs the Lord O my ſoul and all that is within me, bleſs his holy name!" Surely, we are under the higheſt obligations to him, who hath given us ſuch excellent powers. We ought to praiſe him, who hath made us capable of this delightful work. When God made his creatures, he was at liberty to make them as he pleaſed—The potter hath not ſuch abſolute power over the clay, to make one veſſel to honor, and another to diſhonor, as God had in making his creatures—The potter muſt conſider the fitneſs of the clay for the veſſel he deſigns, the nature and the quality of it: but there could be no ſort of fitneſs in the creatures of God, before they had a being. The Angels above, man on earth, and all the inferior creatures, were made what they are, according to the divine pleaſure. There could be no reaſon for the one or the other, out of himſelf. i. e. there could be no reaſon, taken from the creature, why this was an Angel, and that a man; why this was a ſeraph and that a brute—This ſovereignty of the Deity, is a ſtrong argument to excite thoſe to gratitude, who have been diſtinguiſhed in their creation.

Secondly,

Secondly, Though we have ſpirits capable of ſuch great things, yet let us remember we are not capable of every thing.

Compared with the Angels we are weak, ignorant creatures. Let us think of this, when we are diſpoſed to entertain high tho'ts of ourſelves. We have immortal ſpirits, but they are cloſely united to tabernacles of clay, which confine them in their operations; and oblige us to live and act, in ſome meaſure, like the beaſts: Our minds are affected with the wants of the body; our natures call for food, as the animal creation doth; and we are obliged, at frequent returning periods, to ſubmit to a kind of death, for our relief from the burdens of the day, and to render us fit for the purpoſes of life. If by our ſouls, we are akin to heaven, by our bodies we are nearly allied to earth; theſe cannot keep pace with the mind; they clog and hinder it in it's contemplations; they ſoon grow weary, and oblige us to deſiſt from cloſe thought and application.

Some there are, that need to be put in mind of this, who have too exalted thoughts of human nature, and the extent of our underſtanding, as if nothing was beyond it's reach. Our minds, in the preſent ſtate, cannot be kept on a conſtant ſtretch. Nature may be overborne; and by too intenſe

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thinking, ſome have been render'd incapable of all rational agency. The tranſition is eaſy from the height of human wiſdom, to downright folly and madneſs.—Age will weaken the mind, if nothing elſe. Feſtus diſcovered his acquaintance with human nature, though in that inſtance he was groſsly miſtaken, when he ſuppoſed that Paul's much learning had made him mad. Poſſibly there is but little danger in this reſpect, becauſe there are but few cloſe thinkers : but ſurely, 'tis a humbling thought, that the human mind is ſo limited and circumſcribed.

Thirdly, Let none preſume to find fault with their Maker, that they are not made more excellent than they are.

There are ſome who are never ſatisfied ; inſtead of being thankful that they were made ſuperior to the brutes, they are ready to murmur that they were not made equal to the Angels. They enquire, why they are united to theſe earthly and mortal bodies, and have ſo much weakneſs and infirmity attending them. To ſuch as theſe, the rebuke of the apoſtle may be fitly applied, "ſhall the thing formed ſay to him that formed it, why haſt thou made me thus ? Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one veſſel to honor and another to diſhonor ?" Might not he who was at liberty to give thee being or not, give thee ſuch a being as he thought fit ?

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Hath he endowed thee with noble and excellent powers, and made thee capable of exalted happineſs, and wilt thou find fault, that thou art not made better or happier? Can any thing be more inſolent and ungrateful?—Beſides, much of that weakneſs thou complaineſt of, is not to be aſcribed to God our Creator. Man had, in his original make, knowlege and ſtrength enough, to afford him a good degree of felicity, and to preſerve him free from pain and uneaſineſs—It is ſin that makes us ſuch weak imperfect creatures as we find we are. Let us not then charge upon him, that which is owing to the folly and ingratitude of man. Further, and which ought for ever to ſilence every hard thought of God, he hath made proviſion in Chriſt, for our recovery from that ſtate of imperfection and ſin, to which we are reduced. So that if we be not wanting to ourſelves, we ſhall be like the Angels, which kept their firſt ſtate. We ſhall reſemble them, in their entire conformity to the will of God, and the happineſs which naturally flows from it.—The way to attain this bleſſedneſs, is not to find fault with the nature God hath given us, which is the moſt unreaſonable thing in the world; but diligently to improve thoſe excellent means with which we are favored, of growing better and happier.

Fourthly, Since God hath given us living ſouls, and endowed us with reaſon and underſtanding;

we are under the higheſt obligation, to uſe our reaſon, and to act reaſonably.

We ought not to reſign our reaſon to others; whatever opinion we may have of their ſuperior abilities. We are capable of thinking and acting for ourſelves, and God expects we exerciſe the powers he hath given us. We ought, indeed, to uſe the help of others; we ſhould modeſtly attend to the inſtructions of thoſe who are ſuperior to ourſelves, and receive what light we can from them; but we are to think and judge for ourſelves—No man is infallible; and if by implicit faith in others, however wiſe and good, we think and act wrong, we ſhall be juſtly accountable for what we do amiſs; becauſe we have not uſed that capacity which God hath given us of coming at truth.

But, if it is a fault not to uſe our reaſon, it is more criminal to contradict it, as we do whenever we are guilty of ſin. How fit and right is it, that we ſhould devote thoſe powers to God, for which we are indebted to him! There is no reaſoning, that more ſenſibly ſtrikes the mind with conviction, than that of the Pſalmiſt, "Serve the Lord with gladneſs: come before his preſence with ſinging; know ye that the Lord he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we ourſelves: We are his people, and the ſheep of his paſture." It is a moſt evident truth, that he who hath made us, hath a

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right to our ſubmiſſion and obedience. He hath a title to us, and to all our capacities and talents, which cannot be alienated. Whatever he requires of us becomes our indiſpenſable duty. The infinite rectitude of his nature makes it impoſſible, he ſhould command any thing unfit or unreaſonable; and whatever he commands becomes fit and right, from the relation we ſtand in to him, as he is our Creator and we are his creatures.—To preſent ourſelves to him, a living ſacrifice; to make the ſurrender of our whole ſouls to him; and to imploy all our powers and faculties, as he directs and requires, is our moſt reaſonable ſervice. If we have capacities above other creatures; what more fit, than to imploy theſe capacities, to the honor of him who hath made us to differ? This argument gathers ſtrength; when we conſider, that God hath not only given us ſouls, endowed with ſuch noble powers; but that he upholds our ſouls in life, and daily continues to us our reaſon and underſtanding.

How ungrateful and ſinful are they, who, inſtead of devoting themſelves wholly to him, ſerve thoſe luſts and paſſions, which are oppoſite to his nature and will!—Who, inſtead of making it the great buſineſs of life to honor God, which is the great end of their being, continually affront and diſhonor him!—How much better had it been for ſuch as theſe, if they had been among the inferior creatures of God, had never been favoured with reaſon and underſtanding;

underſtanding; yea, unleſs they repent, it had been better for them, never to have had a being. For moſt ſurely, God will have honor from them, if not in an active, yet in a paſſive way. He will glorify himſelf in the deſtruction of thoſe, who will not glorify him by their holineſs and obedience.

Let us therefore improve our talents, ſo that the great end for which they were given to us, may be anſwered. It is true, the reaſon of man is ſo diſturbed by the apoſtacy, that it is not of itſelf ſufficient, even where it hath the help of revelation, to conduct us to true happineſs; nor can we by the efforts of reaſon alone, overcome our paſſions and appetites, which, in the preſent ſtate, are impetuous and irregular. But, bleſſed be God, the goſpel directs us where we may obtain all neceſſary help: and aſſures us, that whatever God commands, may be performed, by the aſſiſtance of the holy Spirit, who is given to men for this very purpoſe. The goodneſs of God, in affording ſuch almighty aids, lays us under the ſtrongeſt bonds to make uſe of them, and to act that rational and wiſe part, which he requires of us.

Fifthly, We ought to conſider others, as of the ſame nature with ourſelves, and to treat them as brethren.

It is the common privilege of mankind, that they are endowed with a ſoul or ſpirit. They are reaſonable

reaſonable creatures. This is the glory of man. It is his reaſon, which diſtinguiſhes him from the lower creation. This gift of heaven is confined to no ſtation, no circumſtances in life. A conſideration which ſhould keep us from deſpiſing, or abuſing our fellow men. Perhaps, they are not ſo rich or great as we are, according to the common eſtimation of greatneſs. Perhaps, they are poor, and in an inferior ſituation. But they have ſouls as well as we—rational and immortal ſouls: And probably, have as large a ſhare of underſtanding. For if we were greater than we are, or in a higher ſtation; it would not prove, that we are ſuperior to our neighbours in mental accompliſhments. "Great men are not always wiſe, neither do the aged underſtand judgment." Or if we excel ſome, yet may we not find others who exceed us much more? We ſhould not like they ſhould deſpiſe, ill-treat or abuſe us. Why then ſhould we deal in this manner with others?—Beſides, if we are ſuperior to our brethren, we have the more to be accountable for: And they, with their few talents, by their better improvement of them, may be placed above us, with our many.—The greater capacity any one hath, the more ready ſhould he be, to help and ſupport thoſe who have leſs.

We are all children of the ſameFather; one God hath created us; and he hath, in the eſſential part of our conſtitution, faſhioned our ſouls alike. We

ought, therefore, to treat one another as brethren. This we may do, and yet a ſuitable diſtinction be preſerved.—The meaneſt ſlave hath a ſoul as good by nature as your's, and poſſibly by grace it is better. A dark complection may cover a fair and beautiful mind. Every ſoul is beautiful, that reſembles the moral character of the bleſſed God, who is the ſtandard of perfection.—Maſters would do well to conſider this; probably, if they did, ſome would ſee reaſon to alter their conduct to their ſervants. Moſt certainly, they who have any ſenſe of religion, would endeavor to their utmoſt, to promote the happineſs of thoſe, whom providence hath placed under their care.

Sixthly, Have we ſpirits ſo excellent in themſelves, and capable of ſo great happineſs, how unworthy of us are thoſe purſuits, in which men are too generally employed!

If we look abroad in the world, we ſhall find them moſt ſtrangely immerſed in ſinful pleaſures; or purſuing after worldly enjoyments, with as much eagerneſs, as though theſe things could yield them happineſs. Yea, is it at all neceſſary, that we ſhould look abroad? ſhall we not find too much of this temper in ourſelves? How worldly! how ſenſual are we! But have we not reaſon to be aſhamed of ſuch a low groveling temper? Are we capable of noble and ſublime pleaſures, even of enjoying God

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the ſupreme good, and ſhall we content ourſelves with delights, which we enjoy in common with the brutes? Are we made for eternity, and ſhall we purſue a happineſs, which, will inevitably fail us, in a very little time? But in truth, your expectations of happineſs from this world are empty and vain. You hew to yourſelves ciſterns, broken ciſterns, that can hold no water, in the neglect of the inexhauſtible fountain of living waters!—Beſides, we muſt ſoon leave the world and all things in it: The rich man died as well as Lazarus the beggar. What relief—what ſatisfaction—can it afford in another world, to think we were rich & great in this! It is a humbling reflection, that we have been ſo long unworthily employ'd. Let us not repeat our folly; but let us lay up treaſure in heaven; which will afford enjoyment, ſubſtantial in it's nature, and permanent in it's duration.

Seventhly, How much reaſon is there, to lament the apoſtacy of man; which hath debaſed our nature, and degraded us among the creatures of God!

You have heard how excellent a creature man is—It is his ſoul or ſpirit which diſtinguiſhes him. He hath powers capable of noble employments, and exalted happineſs—But alas! this ſpirit finds no delight in things ſpiritual; this rational being

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acts directly contrary to reason. Instead of governing his passions and appetites, he allows them to govern him. Worldly objects court his affections, and he suffers himself to be enticed by them. The soul cleaves to the dust, and is excessively fond of this world. It prefers earthly things to God, and to those divine pleasures, which it might derive from this all perfect Being.—Certainly, there is something amiss—Things are not with us as they ought to be—These capacities were given to us for more noble ends. Can this be the creature who was made in the image of God; and placed at the head of this lower world?—Yes, verily it is—But oh how changed from what he originally was!—He hath lost his innocence—He is become a sinner—Satan hath set up his throne in the soul; and the powers of the human mind are too much subjected to this usurper—The understanding is dark, and reason is often perverted. The will chuses sensual delights, in preference to those intellectual pleasures, for which man was designed. The consequence of such a wrong choice must be fatal. A creature, capable of thought and consciousness, who acts contrary to the law of his nature, cannot be happy; his own reflections must make him miserable.

It may well affect us with grief and sorrow, when we consider things calmly and seriously, that man is thus fallen from God: That sin hath been introduced

troduced into the world ; which hath had ſuch fatal effects on the human conſtitution.—Why God hath permitted ſin to be in his ſyſtem ; and whence ariſes the connection, between the ſin of Adam, and thoſe evils which are the conſequence of it, are queſtions, not ſo eaſily anſwered, as ſome vainly imagine. The facts are certain ; that ſin is in the world ; and that the firſt ſin of the firſt man, was the occaſion of all the ſorrow and trouble which his poſterity are ſubjected to. This is perfectly agreable to ſcripture ; and there is no way of accounting for the introduction of evil, either moral or penal, which is attended with leſs difficulty than this.

We have reaſon to think, this apoſtacy would not have been permitted, if God had not determined to glorify the riches of his grace, by ſending his Son, to introduce a new diſpenſation ; under which, the ſalvation of man is made a poſſible thing ; his time of probation is renewed ; and he becomes a candidate for a glorious immortality. We cannot have ſo great reaſon, to lament the apoſtacy of men ; as we have to rejoice, in the report of the goſpel of the bleſſed God.

Eighthly, Let us often think of the excellency and worth of our ſouls.

God hath put a great honor upon them, in making them after his image. He dignified them by

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ſending his Son to redeem them from ſin, and all it's fatal conſequences ; and by uſing ſuch a variety of means, to make them happy and bleſſed forever. By this he hath ſhown, that in his ſight, they are of great price. Shall we then deſpiſe and neglect them ? We,—to whom they are of ſuch vaſt importance ? It becomes us, to contemplate the dignity of our natures, not in order to feed our pride, or to give us exalted thoughts of ourſelves ; but to put us on a due improvement of the powers, with which God hath diſtinguiſhed us. We ought to conſider, how much depends on our acting right ; the inconceivable happineſs or miſery, which awaits us in another ſtate. The ſalvation of our ſouls is the one thing needful. It is the only thing, about which we have any reaſon to be very ſollicitous ; we ought to purſue this in the firſt place, and with an earneſtneſs proportionate to it's infinite importance.

Finally, How great will be the miſery of thoſe who loſe their ſouls !

This is by no means an impoſſible ſuppoſition : It will be the caſe with ſome ; it will be the caſe with us, if we do not accept Chriſt in his whole mediatorial character. Notwithſtanding all he hath done, to promote the happineſs of men ; they may by their impiety and diſobedience, miſs all the advantage of his mediation, they may loſe their ſouls. This doth not intend a deprivation of exiſtence ;

iſtence ; the ſoul may be loſt, in the ſenſe of ſcripture, though it's being is continued. It may exiſt, without enjoying any degree of happineſs. It may be in ſuch a ſtate, as that it's exiſtence may be no favor. Yea, it may be reduced to ſuch a degree of miſery, as that to be put out of being, would be a kindneſs, and annihilation a privilege. In ſuch a caſe, the ſoul would be in a worſe ſtate, than if it was abſolutely loſt, in a literal ſenſe. No temporal evil can be compared with this. No temporal good can make amends for it. " What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul ? Or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul ?"

The infelicity of a creature, who hath only an exiſtence in miſery continued to it, will always bear ſome proportion to it's capacity of happineſs. The beaſts, who are adapted for a lower degree of pleaſure, can have only a lower degree of pain. The Angels, who by their original conſtitution, have a capacity for nobler and higher enjoyments, are capable of more intenſe ſorrow and uneaſineſs. Man is between both ; he is not capacitated for ſo great a degree of happineſs or miſery, as the Angels are ; but, as, compared with the inferior creatures of God, he is capable of exalted happineſs ; ſo he is of an anſwerable degree of miſery—of uneaſineſs and pain, in proportion as his faculties are, in themſelves, noble and excellent. There will, indeed, be a great difference in the final ſtate of bad

bad men; according to the degree of their criminality. But the goſpel pronounces a ſentence of condemnation on all, who die in impenitence and unbelief. As it opens a glorious ſtate of immortality to the righteous; ſo, it reveals the moſt amazing puniſhment to the wicked and ungodly. Nor can they have the leaſt room to expect any new exerciſe of divine mercy. There will be no other plan laid for the relief of thoſe, who reject and deſpiſe that only method, which the wiſdom of God hath appointed, "There remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful looking for of judgment."

As we would avoid ſo awful a doom; Let us make our application to the Redeemer andSaviour of men, in the exerciſe of faith and love. Let us truſt to his merits, and obey his precepts.—This is what God expects from all who enjoy the goſpel; and with the greateſt reaſon. Chriſt is worthy our higheſt regard; whether we conſider what he is in himſelf, or what he hath done for the children of men. Let us not be ſo infatuated, as to prefer the things of time and ſenſe, to this excellent Saviour, in whom, it hath pleaſed the Father that all fulneſs ſhould dwell. But let us commit our ſouls into his hands, who is able to keep that which we commit unto him againſt that day—that great and important day, when he will come to be glorified in his ſaints, and to be admired in all them that believe!

SERMON

SERMON III.

Jesus Christ the only Source of Rest and Happiness.

JOHN VI. 68.

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

IN the preceding part of this chapter, our Lord had declared himself to be the bread of life.—Many were displeased at the mysterious, and figurative manner, in which he saw fit to discourse to them.

Far from condescending to their unreasonable cavils, and perverse humours; he went on to re-

buke them for their unteachable diſpoſition ; and at the ſame time, teſtified the happy effect of his doctrine, upon thoſe who were in a proper temper to receive the truth. " The words that I ſpeak unto you, they are ſpirit, and they are life." i. e. What I have ſaid, is abſurd and unprofitable, if you underſtand me in a literal ſenſe ; but if you receive the doctrine I deliver, in it's true ſpiritual ſenſe, it will be of unſpeakable advantage ; it will begin, and carry on, that divine life in your ſouls, which will terminate in eternal glory and happineſs. " But there are ſome of you, that believe not ;" although I have given ſuch convincing evidence, of my divine miſſion, and exalted character. On this account it is, that " I ſaid unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father." Nothing but almighty power, can remove prejudices ſo deeply rooted, or bring men to ſubmit to the goſpel I preach, who are ſo entirely oppoſite to the nature and deſign of my kingdom. " From that time many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him." They had been influenced to follow him, only by ſecular views ; but they now found, that there was no room for expectations of this kind ; Jeſus had openly diſclaimed a temporal kingdom, and gave no encouragement of great things in this world. Beſides, they preceived, that he was perfectly acquainted with the inſincerity of their hearts ; and could not be impoſed on by their pretences of regard and ſubmiſſion ; they therefore laid

laid aſide the maſk ; caſt off their ſpecious ſhew, and appeared in their true character.

Upon this defection, Jeſus took occaſion to try the faith of the twelve apoſtles, " then ſaid Jeſus unto the twelve, will ye alſo go away ?" To this enquiry, Peter anſwered, in the name of the reſt, " Lord to whom ſhall we go ? Thou haſt the words of eternal life." A noble confeſſion ! made, juſt when our Lord ſeemed to be left almoſt alone, and was deſerted by thoſe crowds, which uſed to attend upon him. The words expreſs the ſenſe the apoſtles had, of the inſufficiency of every ſcheme of happineſs, which the mind of man could deviſe. —Their hearty acquieſcence,in the admirable plan which divine wiſdom had formed—and their firm belief, that this was moſt wiſely adapted, to afford that reſt to the minds of men, which they would in vain purſue, in any other way.

The diſciples of Chriſt acted a moſt wiſe and rational part. The diſpenſation of Moſes had always pointed to a Saviour " who was to come," and introduce a more perfect ſcheme of religion. When Chriſt came, they found that he exactly anſwered the predictions of their ancient prophets : that he taught a religion, perfectly adapted to the ſtate of human nature, and calculated to make men wiſer and better. At the ſame time, he opened to them, the moſt glorious proſpects after this life ; when

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they would drop the weakneſſes and follies of the preſent ſtate ; and be admitted to the higheſt felicity, their natures were capable of. God alſo bore witneſs to his illuſtrious character, and divine miſſion, " by ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles." What could this world offer, to induce them to renounce ſuch an excellent ſyſtem of truth ; or to part with ſuch glorious proſpects ? What other ſcheme of religion could propoſe ſo great advantages, or had equal atteſtations ? It is an unſpeakable mercy to us, that we are favored with the chriſtian revelation—It is the greateſt folly to neglect and deſpiſe it.

" To whom ſhall we go ? Thou haſt the words of eternal life."

What I intend, in diſcourſing on theſe words, is to ſhow the juſtneſs of the ſentiments expreſſed, or implied in them. In order to this,

I ſhall, Firſt, Set before you, the inſufficiency of every ſcheme of happineſs which man can propoſe ; while he neglects Jeſus Chriſt, and the method of ſalvation, which God hath conſtituted by him.

Secondly, I ſhall conſider, how wiſely the goſpel diſpenſation is calculated, to afford reſt and quiet to the mind of man.

Firſt,

Firſt, I am to ſet before you, the inſufficiency of every ſcheme of happineſs, in the neglect of Jeſus Chriſt, and that method of ſalvation which God hath conſtituted through him.

" To whom ſhall we go ?" Where have we any, the leaſt proſpect, of finding reſt ? Shall we ſeek it from the things of this world ? How few are capable of attaining great things here !—Of the multitudes, who make the acquiſition of wealth, the great object of their wiſhes and purſuits ; it is but here and there one that ſucceeds, and reaches the mark he aims at. They lay fine ſchemes, and are full of vaſt projections ; they labour and toil, night and day, to raiſe an eſtate. But their ſchemes prove abortive ; their projections evaporate ; and they meet with continual croſſes and diſappointments. It is well, if they arrive at a mediocrity, and do not ſink into poverty and diſtreſs.—How many are the ſlaves of ambition ! They aſpire to places of power and dignity ; are fond of high titles, and would gladly govern a whole community.—It is eaſy to perceive, that but a ſmall part of theſe can attain their end ; every one cannot be chief ; and the moſt would better conſult their reputation, if they were content to move in a lower ſphere.—If we fail of wealth, we cannot live in pomp ; roll in luxury ; or indulge to pleaſure ; unleſs we call it pleaſure to be as ſordid as the beaſts, and to be continually intoxicated with ſtrong drink ; and, I

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am ſorry to ſay it, the pooreſt among us, can eaſily find means to procure this kind of happineſs.

But be it ſo, that we can attain every worldly enjoyment we wiſh for; riches, honor, and the means of ſenſual delights; perhaps, a ſickly carcaſe incapacitates us, from taking that pleaſure in them, we vainly expected; perhaps, ſome friend, or relative, whom we loved, is in diſtreſs; or they whom we have obliged, are wicked and ungrateful; and make the baſeſt returns for our acts of kindneſs and affection.—This imbitters all our pleaſure; and prevents our taking comfort in our otherwiſe agreable ſituation.

But if we ſuppoſe nothing of this; yet every ſtate hath it's particular cares, anxieties, troubles, and diſappointments; ſo that the moſt proſperous man is far from being happy. There is a void in his ſoul, which this world cannot fill, he wants to change the ſcene, and to contrive ſome new enjoyment; notwithſtanding all his acquiſitions he is diſcontented and uneaſy; and poſſibly, at a greater diſtance from true reſt and quiet of mind, than when he began his purſuit.

Beſides, whatever worldly good he obtains; or however capable he is of enjoying it; yet, amidſt all, he knows he muſt die, and enter into the world of ſpirits, where theſe things cannot follow him, or yield him any ſatisfaction, if they could. What

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an awful, what a gloomy reflection is this, to one, who hath conſulted only, how he might eat, drink, and be merry! Who hath been forgetful of God; and hath taken no care, to improve his time and talents, to the honor of his Creator and Lord! who hath been dead while he lived; dead—to all purpoſes of living! Conſcious of guilt—and conſcious he muſt be of guilt, if he hath any conſciouſneſs, any reflection at all; he cannot think of God without fear; he cannot look into the other world, without amazement; he trembles at the thought, of appearing before a holy, juſt, an almighty Deity, who hath been witneſs of all his impiety; and who, he may reaſonably conclude, will demand an account of the talents committed to him—of the deeds done in the body.

This is the ſtate of men, who ſeek a portion only in this life. They will lie down in ſorrow, and confuſion will cover them. "In the midſt of laughter," ſays the wiſe king Solomon, "the heart is ſorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heavineſs." It is not alway with perſons, as they appear, A jovial countenance is not a certain indication of an eaſy mind; and men often run to the pleaſures of ſenſe, only to forget their ſorrows; and to get rid of the horror they feel within.

But if the world cannot give peace, where elſe ſhall we look? What religion, beſides the chriſti-

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an, can afford any rational expectation, of eaſe and quiet ?—Shall we go to the Jews ? Their religion, it is true, came from God ; but it was only a ſchool-maſter to lead us to Chriſt. The law and the prophets, they teſtify of him. The more we ſtudy them, the more we ſhall ſee of Chriſt in them. And, it was chiefly, as it had a reference to him, the great Mediator, that the religion of the Jews, ever afforded reſt to its votaries.

Shall we repair for reſt to the religion of nature? The religion of nature—What is it ?—Where ſhall we find a compleat ſyſtem of this fine ſcheme, which ſome men cry up with ſo much oſtentation ; and on which they beſtow ſuch high encomiums. How uncertain are ſome of its firſt principles, if we take away the aids it hath received from revelation ! Where ſhall we find its atteſtations ? How flat and jejune are many of the precepts of the beſt heathen philoſophers !—How very different from each other are pagan writers in their ſchemes of religion !—What a mixture of error and abſurdity !—Where is the authority to enforce their ſyſtems on the conſciences of men ?—Beſides, What door of hope, doth the religion of nature open to the ſinner ? What doth it contain, to quiet the conſcience of one, oppreſſed with guilt ? Doth it inſtruct us that God is good ? Doth it not alſo teach us that he is juſt ?—If his mercy give us ſome ground of hope, will not his infinite rectitude make us afraid ? In what a maze of uncertainty are we left !—And

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what a gloom is ſcattered around us! Eſpecially, if we neglect a ſcheme of religion, that hath pretenſions at leaſt to divine authority; and which, the moſt obſtinate deiſt muſt own, hath much to be ſaid in its favor; which, if true, cannot be deſpiſed with innocency; nor rejected with impunity. It not only promiſes the greateſt bleſſings, to thoſe who cordially embrace it; but denounces the moſt amazing deſtruction, to the unbelieving, impenitent, and diſobedient. "He that believeth ſhall be ſaved; he that believeth not ſhall be damned."——

Having endeavoured to ſhew, the inſufficiency of every other plan, Let us now conſider,

In the ſecond place, How wiſely the goſpel diſpenſation is adapted to give eaſe and reſt to the mind of man; and to conduct him to that happineſs, which he vainly purſues in any other way.

"To whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life."

Chriſt was a Teacher ſent from heaven. He had the fulleſt atteſtations to his divine miſſion; and the religion he introduced, was worthy an infinitely wiſe and good Being.—The chriſtian revelation helps us to form right and becoming ſentiments of the Deity. It makes it certain, that God can pardon ſinful man, in a perfect conſiſ-

tency with his own absolute rectitude. It contains the most kind and gracious declarations to fallen man. It teaches us our duty, and what are the necessary means, in order to obtain the perfection and happiness of our reasonable natures. "Come unto me," says our Lord, "all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."† —That rest, which they in vain sought any where else, was to be obtained from Jesus Christ. "The words that I speak they are spirit, and they are life." The words, even of our Lord himself, did not necessarily produce their genuine effect. Many who heard Cnrist, did not believe on him. Some, who had profess'd a regard to him, and attended on his ministry, openly deserted his cause, and walked no more with him: They were not made, either wiser or better, by hearing him, who spake as never man spake: They returned, "with the dog to his vomit," and with "the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." But, under the influence of the Spirit of God, the preaching of Christ had the most blessed, the most salutary effects. His hearers became spiritual and holy, the children of God, and partakers of the divine nature.—They were begotten by the word of truth; and introduced into a new, a spiritual life. Christ gave them rest—not, by opening to them worldly treasures—not, by raising them to exalted stations—not, by leading them to the pleasures of sense—No, but, by con-

† Matthew 11. 28.

convincing them, that their happineſs did not depend on theſe things; by taking off their affections from worldly objects; and by leading them to God, the only ſource of true felicity. The Chriſtian revelation gives no aſſurance of riches and grandeur in this world; but, it teaches us to deſpiſe earthly things; to be contented with the ſituation, in which providence hath placed us. Where it hath it's proper influence, it ſpiritualizes the affections, it makes us heavenly-minded, it diſpoſes us to converſe with God, and to lead lives of univerſal holineſs and obedience, which is the only probable way to have peace in our own minds.

It is the goſpel, and that only, which anſwers that great and intereſting enquiry, What ſhall we do to be ſaved? This reveals to us, that God is reconciling the world unto himſelf by Jeſus Chriſt.—When we view this great, this holy, this juſt Being, in the face of Jeſus Chriſt, or as he manifeſts himſelf in the goſpel; how amiable! how excellent doth he appear! Conſcious of guilt, trembling for fear, we behold an almighty Saviour, who came into our world, upon the moſt benevolent deſign; who not only, while he lived, taught the moſt heavenly doctrine, and ſet a bright example of the moſt perfect virtue, but died to atone for the ſin of man, and by his blood to cleanſe us fro m all unrighteouſneſs. "He died for us, the juſt for the unjuſt, that he might bring us to God." The

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death of ſo glorious a perſon, being by God himſelf ſubſtituted, inſtead of the death of the offender, anſwered all the purpoſes, that could have been anſwered by our puniſhment. God hath, by this wiſe conſtitution, diſplayed the infinite rectitude of his nature, even when he exerciſed his mercy to the ſinner. * "Whom God hath ſet forth to be a propitiation, thro' faith in his blood, to declare his righteouſneſs for the remiſſion of ſins that are paſt, through the forbearance of God, to declare at this time, his righteouſneſs: That he might be juſt, and the juſtifier of him which believeth in Jeſus."

It is to depreciate the merits of Chriſt, and to deſpiſe the mercy of God, only to entertain a doubt, whether Chriſt is able to ſave; or whether God is ready, on account of his merits, to pardon the believing, returning ſinner. It is to diſbelieve the moſt expreſs declarations, and the moſt ample aſſurances, of him who is truth itſelf. Doth the ſcripture ſo plainly, ſo repeatedly declare, "He that believeth ſhall be ſaved?" Doth our Lord invite ſinners, all without exception, to come to him for life and bleſſedneſs? and ſhall we harbour one diſtruſtful thought?—Knowing, that we are believers in Chriſt, we may be ſatisfied, not, that God will forgive us, but that he hath forgiven us. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Chriſt Jeſus." †—"Who ſhall lay any thing to the

* Romans 3. 25, 26. † Romans 8. 1.

the charge of God's elect? It is God that juſtifieth, Who is he that condemneth? It is Chriſt that died, yea, rather, that is riſen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who alſo maketh interceſſion for us." †

What a glorious door of hope, doth the goſpel open to the believer in Chriſt!—That God, who was once his enemy, is now his friend—That juſtice, which once demanded the puniſhment of the guilty ſinner, now pleads for his deliverance from condemnation.—We, who, if judged by ſtrict law, have no righteouſneſs, are conſider'd as righteous—are juſtified, on account of Chriſt's righteouſneſs; God "hath made him to be ſin for us, who knew no ſin; that we might be made the righteouſneſs of God in him." Chriſt endured amazing ſufferings, on account, or by means, of our ſins; we partake of the moſt important bleſſings, on account of his righteouſneſs.

And what an encouragement is this gracious conſtitution to a chriſtian! What an excitement to univerſal holineſs! Till we have a view of God, in and by Jeſus Chriſt, he appears a conſuming fire, awful and terrible, there is no certainty, that he will take any favourable notice of our ſervices, or accept our obedience. No wonder then, a ſinner—oppreſs'd with a ſenſe of guilt—deſtitute of hope—hath no thought of returning to him. But, when

† Rom. 8. 33. 34.

when the glorious God appears ſeated on a throne of grace; proclaiming deliverance to the captive; inviting the backſlider to return; promiſing every valuable and important bleſſing, to thoſe who accept his invitation, and come to him through Jeſus Chriſt; how great the encouragement, which the ſinner may take from hence, to repent and turn to God! With what entire confidence may he truſt to the aſſurances of the word, that God will graciouſly accept his imperfect works of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt to the praiſe and glory of God! What an argument is this, to devote ourſelves to this moſt kind and benevolent Being! "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your ſpirit, which are God's." How conſtraining a motive to one, who hath a juſt ſenſe of the love and goodneſs of God, manifeſted by his Son Jeſus Chriſt!—We may talk of the beauty of virtue; of moral fitneſs; of the reaſon and nature of things; of the tendency of holineſs, to promote our health; our eaſe; our reputation in the world; and, it muſt be owned, they are all arguments of great weight; but a clear view, an affecting ſenſe of the ſufferings of JeſusChriſt, and a due conſideration of the end and deſign of theſe ſufferings, are arguments, which will weigh more, with a true chriſtian, than all the reſt—A ſenſe of the torments to which ſin expoſes us, may make us afraid of ſinning, but it is the goodneſs of God, that leadeth to repentance—That goodneſs which is illuſtriouſly diſ-

diſplayed in the chriſtian revelation. This powerful motive, makes every other conſideration appear light, and unimportant. This, duly impreſs'd on the heart, will engage us, to run with chearfulneſs the race ſet before us; to run and not be weary; to walk and not faint. He, who hath much forgiven, and who hath a juſt ſenſe of the obligation, will love much. He who loves God much, will evidence this love by keeping all his commandments; and in keeping the commandments of God, a chriſtian will always find great reward. An inward principle of religion, will quiet his paſſions, regulate his affections, and fill his ſoul with a calm, a joy, which a ſtranger intermeddleth not with. The greater progreſs he makes in the divine life, ſo much the more reaſon he hath to be ſatisfied, that he is born of the Spirit.—The more he hath of the temper of a diſciple of Chriſt, ſo much the more certain it is, that he is his diſciple—this he accounts his higheſt honor; his greateſt happineſs.—The more certain he is, that he is one of Chriſt's diſciples, ſo much the greater comfort doth he derive, from the great and precious promiſes of the goſpel, that God will take him under his guidance, his care, and his protection; that he will make all things work together for his good; that he will be his Friend, his Father, his Portion.

The promiſes do not include an exemption from death. The chriſtian knows that he muſt die. There is no diſcharge in that war.—In this

this reſpect, there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked. But faith ſcatters the horrors of the grave. The goſpel reveals a reſurrection of the dead. "As in Adam all die, ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive." St. Peter ſays, "Thou haſt the words of eternal life." And the apoſtle John tells us, "This is the promiſe, he hath promiſed us, even eternal life." This eternal life, we are to enjoy; not, in this weak imperfect ſtate; not, in this vain and ſinful world, where we are ſurrounded with cares, ſorrows and temptations: but, in heaven; where the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and the weary are at reſt; where ſin and ſorrow are no more; where we ſhall ſee Chriſt, our Saviour and Lord; and enjoy God, without interruption, without intermiſſion; where only we can know, how much God hath done for us, and how much good he hath laid up in ſtore for them that love him. What can diſturb one, who hath ſuch views, and ſuch proſpects! With what contempt may he look down on the joys and ſorrows, the frowns and flatteries of a vain world! None of theſe things move him; nor doth he account his life dear, ſo he may finiſh well, and enter into the joy of his Lord. How did the apoſtles and primitive ſaints, triumph over the king of terrors, when he put on the moſt gloomy form! They rejoiced, that they were counted worthy to ſuffer for Chriſt; and chearfully reſigned up every thing they held dear in this world, even life itſelf, for his ſake. Such was their

regard

regard for their maſter ; ſuch was the bleſſed influence of the religion they profeſſed. Death is ſo far from being a terror to a chriſtian, who is poſſeſſed of the aſſurance of hope, that he eſteems it a friendly meſſenger, ſent to releaſe him from this priſon, to which he is at preſent confined—a harbinger of the glory which God hath promiſed and prepared. When by faith he takes a view of the heavenly Canaan, and looks forward to that reſt which remains for the people of God, he would not live always in this uncomfortable world ; he can hardly content himſelf in this vale of tears ; and cries out with joy and gratitude—Come Lord Jeſus, come quickly. He thinks with holy tranſport of that bleſſed time, when this mortal will put on immortality ; and this corruptible will put on incorruption ; and death will be ſwallowed up in victory : When Chriſt who is our life ſhall appear, and we ſhall appear with him in glory : When we ſhall be admitted to to the beatific viſion of God, in whoſe preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore.

Theſe are great things for a ſinful worm to look for. But a chriſtian doth not allow himſelf to ſtagger through unbelief. He doth not object his own unworthineſs, his exceeding ſinfulneſs, his aggravated guilt. He remembers that he hath the word and promiſe of the true and faithful God : " Hath he ſaid and ſhall he not do it ? Or hath he

ſpoken, and ſhall he not make it good ?"—Under all his fears and doubts, he repairs to that Saviour, who hath the words of eternal life, and hath taught us the way to a bleſſed immortality. With intire confidence, he ventures his ſoul upon the truth of chriſtianity; he relies upon the merits of the Redeemer; and daily commits himſelf to him, being perſuaded, that he is able to keep the ſacred depoſitum, and will preſent him faultleſs before God, and his Father, with exceeding joy.

I M P R O V E M E N T.

Firſt, We learn from what hath been ſaid, the wiſdom of the true chriſtian.

With what ſincere pity, and tender emotions, did the diſciples who ſtill adhered to Chriſt, look upon all thoſe who left their Maſter, and relinquiſhed their expectations from him, poſſibly for ever! Juſt ſo may you, who have an inward acquaintance with chriſtianity, look upon all thoſe who reject Chriſt, and neglect his great ſalvation. Perhaps, they are rich and proſperous; perhaps, you are poor and deſpiſed: But they are the enemies of God, and expoſed to his eternal wrath; whereas he hath called and choſen you, and made you heirs of eternal bleſſedneſs. Would you change ſtates with them? Moſt certainly you would not. You cannot be a chriſtian, and repent of your choice. You

cannot

cannot but know, that you act the moſt rational and wiſe part. You cannot but look on them as fools and madmen, who eat, drink and are merry, while hanging over the pit of eternal deſtruction—Why then do you envy them their good things, which will laſt but a little while, and will terminate in remedileſs perdition ? Why are you diſcontented with your lot ? What ! though you meet with difficulties and trials ; theſe are deſigned for your benefit ; they are but for a ſeaſon, and will be followed with endleſs happineſs and joy. When you conſider your character and your proſpects, it ought deeply to humble you, that your lives are in no degree anſwerable. You walk too much by ſight ; you live too little by faith. Your hearts are unreaſonably attached to earthly things, though you are citizens of Zion, the Jeruſalem that is above.

Secondly, How great obligations are you under to thankfulneſs, who are made heirs of eternal life !

Inſtead of looking on the men of the world with any ſort of envy, you ought to adore and praiſe God, who hath made you to differ from them. It is not owing to your own ſuperior reaſon, that you are better then others ; Divine grace hath made you what you are. But for this, you had been like

thoſe

thoſe around you, who chuſe a portion in this life, in preference to that glorious ſtate of immortality which the goſpel reveals : You would, like them, ſpend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which profiteth not. When you taſte the pleaſures of religion, when you contemplate the happineſs of the future ſtate—Think of the goodneſs of God in ſending his own Son to die for you.—Meditate on the love of Chriſt, in ſubmitting to be a man of ſorrows ; in giving himſelf an offering, and a ſacrifice to God ; in becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the croſs. —Think for whoſe ſakes he endured theſe amazing ſufferings ; it was for us, ſinners—Think of the end he had in view ; it was, that the ſalvation of man might be accompliſhed, in a conſiſtency with the perfections of the Deity. He died, that you might live through him.

Can they be thought to have a juſt ſenſe of this infinite love, who neglect an ordinance which Chriſt hath himſelf enjoined, as an expreſſion of regard to him ; and which is peculiarly adapted to beget and increaſe our affection to him ? They, who continue in this neglect, notwithſtanding all the arguments that are uſed with them, with as little concern, as if it were a matter of indifference, whether Chriſt is obeyed, or not ? May not the words of the text be applied to them—"Will ye alſo go away?" Whither can you go with ſo much advantage, as to this

holy

holy ordinance ? Is not your neglect of it, the reaſon that you are ſo dead in all the offices of religion ? And that you do not walk more circumſpectly,and more uniformly,in your chriſtian courſe ? Indeed, a bare attendance on ordinances, is not enough to conſtitute you chriſtians ; you muſt have reſpect to him, who hath the words of eternal life, or you will reap but little advantage from your obſervance of the inſtitutions of religion. If you do not partake of the bread of life which came down from heaven, you can receive no ſpiritual nouriſhment.

Let thoſe who profeſs the religion of Chriſt, be careful to evidence their ſincerity to the world, by an anſwerable converſation. Since you do not expect happineſs from earthly things, why do you diſcover ſuch an earthly temper ? Why are you ſo deeply affected with the joys or troubles of life ? Recollect, that this world is not your home,and that you have expectations which the world cannot diſappoint. " Seek the things that are above, where Chriſt ſitteth at the right hand of God." Caſt your cares and burthens on the Lord, and he will ſuſtain you. We are all quickly to go hence, we are to leave the preſent evil world, we are to go to our Father's houſe—There we ſhall be at reſt. Let us contemplate that happy time, when that Jeſus, who hath favoured us with the words of eternal life, and the means of attaining it, will give us eternal

life

life itſelf. Oh! the joy of that bleſſed day, when our great Redeemer will deſcend from heaven, with a ſhout, with the voice of the Arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and will invite us to the bleſſedneſs he hath purchaſed, in that tranſporting language; "Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world?" Oh! the bleſſedneſs of that ſtate, when we ſhall be free from ſin, which ought to be our greateſt burthen; and ſhall know, even as we are known. "Having a promiſe of ſuch reſt, let us not ſeem to come ſhort of it through unbelief."

Let ſinners in *Zion*, tremble at the thought of that eternal ſeparation, which will be made in the great day, between the righteous and the wicked; and of thoſe inconceivable torments to which they will be conſigned, who ſhall be found at the left hand of the Judge. Let them forſake thoſe lying vanities which now delude them, and caſt themſelves upon the mercy of God through Jeſus Chriſt. Your ſins are many; your guilt is great; but Chriſt is able to ſave to the uttermoſt, all them that come to God through him.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

The Dominion of an omnipotent Deity a Reaſon for Joy and Praiſe.

REVELATION XIX. 6.

Alleluia : *for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

IN the preceeding chapter, we have a prediction of the overthrow of myſtical Babylon, the ſeat of the beaſt, by which is intended the deſtruction of *Rome* papal, or the fall of the man of ſin, whoſe kingdom was founded by human policy and power, and hath been ſupported by every kind of unrighteous deceit. An Angel is repreſented as proclaiming aloud, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen."—From the

the deſcription we have in this prophecy, it ſeems, as if *Rome* like ancient *Babylon*, was to be reduced to a heap of ruins, never to be rebuilt, but to remain deſolate and uninhabited. Her deſtruction was to be ſudden, entire, and perpetual.

When this perſecuting power was thus totally deſtroyed, the heavenly church is introduced, with united voices, ſinging an anthem of praiſe to God, for his righteous vengeance on the cruel oppreſſors of his people; and for his faithfulneſs, in ſupporting, protecting, and delivering his perſecuted ſaints. "After theſe things, I heard," ſays the apoſtle John, "a great voice of much people in heaven, ſaying, Alleluia, ſalvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord, our God. For true and righteous are his judgments, for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornications, and hath avenged the blood of his ſervants at her hand. And again, they ſaid, Alleluia; and her ſmoke roſe up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, and the four *living creatures*, fell down and worſhipped God, that ſat on the throne, ſaying, Amen, Alleluia." When this hymn of praiſe was ended, there came forth an order from the throne, or ſeat of the divine preſence, to the ſaints on earth, to join in theſe heavenly acclamations of praiſe. "And a voice came out of the throne, ſaying, praiſe our God, all ye that fear him, both ſmall and great."—"A voice from the throne,"

throne," ſays Mr. Lowman, " is from the glory, or " the oracle ; this ſhews the great authority and " ſolemnity, with which this order was publiſhed. " The praiſe of God, to which this oracle directs, " ſeems ſomewhat different from that of the fore- " going hymn ; that hymn was to celebrate the " praiſe of God, principally on account of his faith- " fulneſs and juſtice, in the puniſhment of a per- " ſecuting power, which had long oppreſs'd the " faithful ſervants of Chriſt. But this, as appears " by the following hymn, in obedience to the di- " rection of the oracle, is principally to praiſe God, " for the happy and glorious ſtate of the church, " conſequent upon this puniſhment of their ene- " mies ; that happy and glorious ſtate of the " church, ſuppoſe, wherein it is ſaid to live and " reign with Chriſt a thouſand years, and which is " more largely deſcribed in the following chapter. " For which great goodneſs of God, all good men " are prepared, by this ſolemn thankſgiving, to " expreſs their hearty and grateful acknowledge- " ments." The word was no ſooner given to praiſe God, than it was inſtantly obeyed. " And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, Alleluia ; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herſelf ready." The exact period, when theſe prophecies will be accompliſhed, is not mentioned ; at leaſt

not ſo clearly, as that we are able, certainly to determine when it will be. They who have pretended to aſcertain it, have only publiſhed their own miſtakes. But there is enough known of the infinitely perfect Jehovah, to ſatisfy us that he will be faithful to his promiſes, and that the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs will finally prevail againſt all oppoſition; a reaſonable foundation this for reſt, for gratitude, for praiſe.—It is a reaſon for joy and thankfulneſs, that there is a proſpect of ſuch a time—The reaſon will be ſtronger when the time actually comes—Then, when his enemies ſhall be ſubdued under him, the Lord will triumph glorioufly.

We are not to ſuppoſe, that the bleſſed God is, at other times, only a ſpectator of the things that take place in the world. His direction and government of events are limited to no particular ſeaſon; he always ſets at helm, and ſuperintends univerſal nature. This conſideration may well quiet our minds, and affords a reaſon for peace comfort and joy, when things look moſt dark: The call to gratitude and to praiſe is ſtill more evident, when this glorious Being appears for the help of his people, and grants them ſalvation. "The word Alleluia or Hallelujah, is a moſt lively and comprehenſive expreſſion of praiſe, often uſed, and tranſlated, *Praiſe ye the Lord*, in the Pſalms, the five laſt of which, with ſeveral others, begin and end, as this heavenly hymn doth, with that word."

What

What I propoſe in this diſcourſe, is,

Firſt, To conſider the title by which the great God is deſcribed in the text—" The Lord God omnipotent."

Secondly, To ſpeak of his univerſal dominion and government.

Thirdly, To ſhew, that this conſideration is a reaſonable foundation for joy and praiſe.

Firſt, I am to conſider the title by which the great God is deſcribed in the text—" The Lord God omnipotent."

By the omnipotence of God, we underſtand a capacity or ability of doing whatſoever he pleaſes. An arbitrary power, in the imperfect ſons of men, we juſtly abhor; but in God, we connect with it the idea of infinite reaſon and goodneſs. The will of God is always determined by his perfect wiſdom, and is entirely conſiſtent with abſolute perfection. Whatever God wills is wiſe and good, holy and juſt. It is not enough to ſay, his will is not inconſiſtent with theſe attributes, there is the exerciſe of theſe attributes in all he wills, in all he does. To ſay, therefore, that God doth according to his will or pleaſure, is to ſay, that he doth what is right and fit, that which is dictated by his wiſdom, and which becomes an

all-

all-perfect Being. In this ſenſe we are to underſtand that expreſſion, "Thou haſt made all things, and for thy pleaſure they are and were created."

The power of God is infinite; it extends to all things poſſible, to all things that are conſiſtent with the perfection of his nature. It doth not extend to impoſſibilities; it would be abſurd to ſay, God could do a thing and not do it at the ſame time. To do a thing wrong and unfit, would be an imperfection; and therefore to ſuppoſe ſuch a capacity in God, is not to honor him, but to make him in our thoughts, altogether ſuch an one as ourſelves.

That God is omnipotent, no one will be diſpoſed to deny, who conſiders what great things he hath done. What can be beyond the reach of his power, who formed this ſtupendous univerſe? and ſpake innumerable worlds into being? He who hath communicated ſuch amazing powers and abilities to his creatures, who hath conſtituted cauſes ſufficient to produce ſuch great effects, muſt have all power in himſelf. If it may not be ſaid that infinite power is diſplayed in the works of God, becauſe they are finite; yet we rationally conclude, that the being who produced them is infinite in power. To fix limits to his power, who hath done ſo much, is to the laſt degree unreaſonable. To make objections againſt his omnipotence, becauſe he hath not done all he could do, is evidently abſurd;

ſurd : It is to ſay he is not omnipotent, becauſe he hath ſtill a power of acting. It certainly implies nothing abſurd or contradictory, to aſcribe this attribute to God : Whereas it contradicts all our notions of a Deity, to ſuppoſe any thing too hard, or too great, for him to do. If he is not infinite in power, he is not infinite in any perfection. His other attributes can extend no further than his power. Conſequently, he is not God, he is not a Being of infinite perfection. If we deny the Deity any one attribute, we involve ourſelves in all the difficulties and abſurdities of atheiſm. Therefore, the ſcripture, which was deſigned to give us juſt notions of God, aſcribes to him every perfection, and in an infinite degree. Particularly, it teaches us, that "power belongeth unto God." ¶ "In thine hand," ſays the devout king Jehoſhaphat, "is there not power and might, ſo that none is able to withſtand thee?" * "I know," ſays holy Job, "that thou canſt do every thing." † In another place, ſpeaking of God, he ſays, ‡ "He is wiſe in heart, and mighty in ſtrength, who hath hardened himſelf againſt him, & hath proſpered? Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which ſhaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the ſun, and it riſeth not: and ſealeth up the ſtars. Behold he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will ſay unto him, what doeſt thou?" In the New Teſtament, we find an Angel ſaying,

"With

¶ Pſa. 62. 11. * 2 Chron. 20. 6. † Job 42. 2. ‡ 9. 4.

" With God nothing ſhall be impoſſible." * And our Lord ſays, " With men it is impoſſible, but not with God, for with God all things are poſſible." †

I am, in the ſecond place, to ſhow that this glorious Being, who is the Lord God omnipotent, hath the government of the world in his hands. " The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

The power of God is not a mere capacity of nature, which he ſuffers to lie idle and uſeleſs. It is continually in exerciſe, and ever hath been. It diſcovers very narrow and contracted ſentiments, to confine the creating power of God to this earth, or ſyſtem, or to what we know and are acquainted with: One can ſcarce imagine, that there were not creatures before man, upon whom God might exerciſe his infinite perfections. It is much more reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the Almighty hath been, through eternity, producing worlds, and creatures to inhabit them. The word heaven, as uſed in ſcripture, may ſometimes include in it the infinite expanſe, all above or beſides this earth; it may contain a large and wide creation; and all theſe things his hands have made; his word ſpake them into being. " I have made the earth, and created man upon it. I, even my hands have ſtretched out the heavens, and all their hoſts have I commanded."

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* Luke 1. 34. † Mark 10. 27.

The ſame omnipotent Creator, which brought the world out of nothing, gave the different parts of the creation, their various natures and laws, their ſituation and motion, as he ſaw fit. And having made them, he exerciſes his power, his goodneſs, his wiſdom, in preſerving, directing, and governing them. The providence of God extends as far as the creation. Whatever he hath brought into being, depends upon him for its continuance in being; its having exiſtence one moment, doth not make its exiſtence neceſſary the next; its former exiſtence is not the cauſe of its exiſting afterwards; it continues in being, not becauſe it hath exiſted, but becauſe this is the will of the Creator. And if the will of God determines the continuance of a thing created, he muſt alſo determine the ſtate and circumſtances in which it ſhall continue: It muſt be under ſuch laws and regulations, or have ſuch powers and capacities as he ſees fit to give it. There can be no accident with reſpect to him, no change or alteration unknown to, or unforeſeen by him; becauſe he always hath, in one grand view, all events, paſt, preſent and to come. Nothing comes to paſs without his influence and appointment.

There is, indeed, a difference between creatures that are moral agents, and thoſe that are not. The latter have no capacity of acting; and move only as they are put in motion by ſome external agent. The former have an internal power of acting, and

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are capable of chuſing, willing, and determining. A creature devoid of ſuch a power, cannot have a moral capacity, nor be under any moral obligation. "A being who cannot act at all, moſt certainly cannot act well or ill, virtuouſly or viciouſly." It is evident, that too many of thoſe creatures whom God made with a capacity of acting right, have deviated from the path of duty, and been guilty of moral evil. To aſcribe the wickedneſs of his creatures, to the all-perfect Deity, is impiety: We ought not to entertain the tho't, that he made them wicked at firſt; or, that they became wicked afterwards by his impulſive influence. The apoſtle James will not allow it to be ſaid, that God tempts men to ſin, much leſs can he compel them to be ſinful. "Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." ¶

God is not the author of ſin; he doth not make men ſinful; though, for wiſe and holy ends, he permits ſin to be in the world, continues the exiſtence of the wicked and ungodly, and their powers of action. He affords them means of coming to the knowledge of their duty; he is ready to grant them all neceſſary aſſiſtance to right practice; when he ſees fit, he lays his reſtraints on the luſts and corruptions of men; and always over-rules their evil conduct to ſome valuable end. As he hath an entire view of all that will be, of the actions of

¶ James i. 13.

of free agents, as well as all other events, ſo he hath laid his plan accordingly. "It is true," ſaith Mr. *Wollaſton*, "this amounts to a prodigious ſcheme, in which all things to come are as it were comprehended under one view, eſtimated, and laid together: But when," ſays he, "I conſider what a maſs of wonders the univerſe is in other regards; what a Being God is, incomprehenſibly great and perfect; that he cannot be ignorant of any thing, no not of the future wants and deportments of particular men; and that all things, which derive from him as the firſt cauſe, muſt do this ſo as to be conſiſtent with one another, and in ſuch a manner, as to make one compact ſyſtem, befitting ſo great an author: I ſay, when I conſider this, I cannot deny ſuch an adjuſtment of things to be within his power." The allwiſe God hath not excluded ſin from his ſyſtem; but he hath ſo calculated things, as that the ſins of men ſhall not break in upon the order of his ſcheme, but ſhall rather be ſubſervient to his deſigns.

We may ſometimes, though not always, ſee wiſe and good ends, in things that at firſt look dark.—For inſtance, if the cauſe of virtue ſeem to be oppreſſed, and almoſt overwhelmed; men, who have very imperfect views, may think it is becauſe God hath no regard to what paſſeth here; or, which is worſe, that there is no diſtinction between good and evil, virtue and vice: But God may deſign to correct thoſe whom he loves, for the defect of their

love to him, for their conformity to the world, and fondneſs for the pleaſures and enjoyments of it: He may deſign to purge out their droſs, and to prepare them for another and eternal ſtate.—Do the wicked triumph? ſome may think, it would not be thus, if the world were governed by a holy, a juſt, a wiſe Being: But God may ſuffer them to riſe high, that their fall may be more conſpicuous, and that he may diſplay his power and juſtice in their deſtruction. That he will do this, ſooner or later, is clear from the declarations of his word: If theſe predictions are not fulfilled in this world, they will be fulfilled in another. A future ſtate will ſet all to rights: God may then diſcover his approbation of moral rectitude, and his infinite diſpleaſure at ſin, by rewarding the righteous, and puniſhing the wicked, according to their works. However particular events may ſeem to look otherwiſe, yet the ſcripture evidently teaches us, that God hath the good of his church always in view. It doth not prove the contrary, that things have a dark aſpect to us, who are but weak ſhort-ſighted mortals. Thoſe very things, which we think are dark and threatning, may be deſigned in favour, and may iſſue in the greateſt good. If we lay together what we are taught in the ſeveral parts of ſcripture; it ſeems, as if every great event, which hath any connection with the church of God, was to verify ſome prediction, or to fulfil ſome promiſe. And as all is to iſſue in the proſperity of the church, and in the

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triumph of virtue and goodneſs; ſo, it is probable, all things that come to paſs are made to conſpire to this end. A Being of infinite wiſdom and almighty power can make things to terminate, quite differently from our views and expectations, and even from their own natural tendency; the event may be very different from, yea contrary to, what would have taken place without his particular interpoſition. And though we do not, at preſent, ſee any thing which looks like ſuch a happy winding up of things, as we are taught to expect; yet, there have been, from time to time, illuſtrious diſplays of divine power and goodneſs. The God of heaven hath often interpoſed for the relief of his people, when they have been in low and difficult circumſtances; he hath protected them in their greateſt dangers; he hath ſcattered the clouds that ſeemed ready to break over their heads; he hath granted them ſalvation, when, according to their view of things, there was leaſt reaſon to expect it; or he hath afforded ſucceſs to their undertakings, even beyond their hopes. Thus, he hath preſerved to himſelf a church in the world, notwithſtanding the attempts of earth and hell to deſtroy it. He hath delivered it, when its enemies ſeemed ready to ſwallow it up. And, at particular times, his cauſe hath flouriſhed and triumphed; religion hath prevailed; and its enemies have been made to hide their heads.

Theſe great events both ſcripture and reaſon teach us to aſcribe to the power of God. "Whatſoever," ſaith the devout pſalmiſt, "the Lord pleaſeth, that doth he in heaven and in earth, and in all deep places. ¶ "He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and amongſt the inhabitants of the earth; and none can ſtay his hand." † "There are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheleſs the counſel of the Lord, that ſhall ſtand." ‡ Our Saviour teaches us that the providence of God extends to the moſt minute events; "Are not two ſparrows ſold for a farthing, and one of them ſhall not fall to the ground without your Father." § Surely then, he doth not neglect human affairs; he directs and governs thoſe important events, which affect communities, kingdoms, and countries. If he attends to the circumſtances of individuals, ſo as to number the very hairs of their heads; we may with reaſon ſuppoſe, that he is Governor among the nations, and ruleth to the ends of the earth.

We ſometimes ſay, that things come about in the courſe of nature; "but the courſe of nature, ſeparate from the agency of God, is no cauſe, or nothing. If there are laws, by which natural cauſes act, and things ſucceed one another in a regular uniform manner, and with but little variation; and

¶ Pſ. 135. 6. † Dan. 4. 35. ‡ Prov. 19. 21. § Mat. 10. 29.

and in general the conſtitution of things is preſerved ;" theſe laws are nothing elſe than the will of him, who is the Author of nature. If He ſhould ceaſe to will the connection between cauſes and effects, the connection would immediately ceaſe. I cannot, therefore, well underſtand what they mean, who deny the divine ſuperintendency ; and ſuppoſe a certain eſtabliſhed order, or courſe of things, according to which they muſt come to paſs. A mere law, or order, ſeparate from the will and power of God, cannot exiſt ; and if they mean the will and power of God, governing all events, they own the thing we contend for—that God governs the world.

Before I diſmiſs this head of the divine government, I would add, that God governs the world by Jeſus Chriſt. " All power is given to me," ſays our Lord, " in heaven and in earth. † And the apoſtle, ſpeaking of the glory of Chriſt, ſays, " God —hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be Head over all things to the church." ‡ Some have ſuppoſed, that the Son of God is intended by the " Lord God omnipotent " in the text ; as he is elſewhere called " the mighty God." Whether this be ſo or not, it is certain, as Mediator, the kingdoms of Providence and of Grace are committed to him ; " the government is upon his ſhoulder." His adminiſtration will continue, till he hath ſubdued

† Matthew 28. 18. ‡ Epheſians 1. 22.

dued all things under him; "and then ſhall the Son alſo himſelf be ſubject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." §

I proceed now to the third general head, viz. This conſideration, that the great God governs the world, is a reaſonable foundation for joy and praiſe. "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

It is an everlaſting ſource of comfort, that the government of the world is in the hands of a Being of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs—of one, who doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men—of one, who knows how to bring light out of darkneſs, joy out of ſorrow, order out of confuſion—of one, who can over-rule even the paſſions and corruptions of men to his glory—of one, who hath promiſed, to make all things work together for good to them that love him; and that the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs ſhall finally prevail againſt all oppoſition.

It is a reaſon for holy joy and praiſe, that this wiſe and good Being, who hath promiſed ſo much to his people, is able to do what his goodneſs inclines him to do; and to accompliſh all that he hath promiſed. "None can ſtay his hand, or ſay unto him, what doeſt thou?" * "Behold the nations

§ 1 Cor. 15. 28. * Daniel 4. 35.

tions are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the ſmall duſt of the balance; behold, he taketh up the iſles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him leſs than nothing, and vanity." § With what ſerenity and patience, may that man poſſeſs his ſoul, who can view all things under the direction, controul, and government, of an infinite Being, who always intends the good of his creatures; who knows wherein their happineſs conſiſts; and whoſe power can effect what his goodneſs deſigns. It is impoſſible he ſhould do any thing amiſs. He neceſſarily doth that which is beſt to be done. It no ways becomes us creatures of yeſterday, to find fault with any thing God does; or to entertain doubts and ſuſpicions, whether that world which he governs, will be well governed. It is contrary to all the rules of reaſon and religion, to ſuffer ourſelves to ſink into deſpair, or a reſtleſs anxiety, becauſe things do not turn out according to our expectations and deſires; or becauſe we meet with things that are for the preſent, not joyous but grievous. It is becauſe men have not juſt ſentiments of God, and proper notions of his government, that they do not always acquieſce in the diſpoſals of his Providence; or elſe, it is becauſe we are too much attached to this world, and not enough converſant with another.

If we conſider our ſituation here only, or chiefly, things may have a very unpromiſing aſpect; but when

§ Iſaiah 40. 15. 17.

when we conſider our connection with another ſtate, thoſe things which ſeem to be againſt us, may have a quite contrary tendency—they may be calculated to wean us from a world we are too fond of ; to purify our ſouls ; and to prepare us for that ſtate of perfection, to which God purpoſes to raiſe us ; and in this view they are moſt merciful diſpenſations ; not to be deprecated as evils, but rejoiced in as benefits. We ought always to account that to be good, which tends to our advantage upon the whole ; we may not therefore repine at temporal calamities and afflictions, becauſe we may eaſily conceive, that in the concluſion of things, it may turn out beſt that we have met with them.

Eſpecially, may the man of religion and virtue rejoice in the conſideration of the divine government. Conſcious of an upright heart, knowing that he hath committed his ſoul into the hands of the Redeemer and Saviour of men, he can look upon God as reconciled to him through Jeſus Chriſt ; he can ſurvey the promiſes with inward delight and ſatisfaction, aſſured that they will be fulfilled in him ; he can caſt his care upon the Lord who careth for him ; he looks on the afflictions he meets with, as the tender corrections of a Father, and not the puniſhment of an angry Judge. Secure of the divine protection, he is unmoved, tho' beſet with threatning dangers, and ſurrounded with evils, which a righteous God ſees fit to bring on an

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ungodly world. By faith he looks beyond the grave, takes a view of the promiſed land, and rejoices in the proſpect of a bleſſed immortality.

But if a chriſtian finds reaſon to rejoice in the divine government, when his outward circumſtances are dark and perplexed; or when God writes bitter things againſt him; ſurely, there is room for the exerciſe of joy and praiſe, when he is ſurrounded with bleſſings; when his ſituation in this world is eaſy and pleaſant, and goodneſs and mercy continually follow him.

All the good things which a chriſtian enjoys, he conſiders as conferred on him by God, he meditates on them with gratitude, and his devout ſoul breaks forth in aſcriptions of praiſe to him who hath made him to differ from others. Since God governs the world, we ought to eye his hand in all the good we experience, whether as members of ſociety or as individuals; we ought to rejoice in his government, to maintain a conſtant ſenſe of his goodneſs, and to give unto him the glory due to his name. This hath been the practice of the ſaints in all ages. We have a bright example of gratitude in the royal pſalmiſt, his mouth is always full of the praiſes of God; he never ſeems ſo much in his element, as when he ſpeaks of the goodneſs of God, and his loving-kindneſs to the children of men. "I will ſing of the mercies of the Lord forever; I will make known his faithfulneſs to all ge-

nerations." There is no duty more reaſonable in itſelf ; more delightful to thoſe who practice it ; and which more becomes thoſe, whom he hath made capable of this heavenly employment. " Praiſe is comely for the upright." They have the moſt to be thankful for, they are the moſt capable of performing this excellent duty, and therefore they are under the ſtrongeſt obligations to attend it. Good men ought to praiſe God for common or extraordinary mercies ; for private or publick, for temporal or ſpiritual bleſſings ; for the diſpenſations of providence that are oppoſite to their deſires and inclinations, as well as for thoſe that are agreable to them. In every ſituation their pious minds may find reaſon to ſpeak well of his name. Whatever their outward condition is, the Lord is their portion ; they are the children of God ; and heirs of glory.

I ſhall now lead you to ſome reflections ſuitable to the ſubject we have been upon.

In the firſt place, How great and glorious does the bleſſed God appear in the character of " the Lord God omnipotent !" We gaze at a diſtance on earthly monarchs ; we account them great, becauſe they are ſurrounded with attendants, who wait their nod, and ſtand ready to fulfil their commands. But how little, how contemptible do they appear, when compared with the infinite God !

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Their power reaches over ſome ſmall part of this lower world; the power of God extends not to a part, but to the whole of this globe; it reaches throughout univerſal nature; it is not limited by the creation; infinite ſpace lies open to omnipotence. Whatever he wills, he is able to do. None can control, none can reſiſt his power.—How great! how awful is this almighty Lord! With how much reaſon doth the guilty ſinner tremble before this gloriousBeing, who is juſtly incenſed at his crimes; who is able to cruſh him into nothing in a moment; or if he continues his exiſtence, can render it compleatly miſerable! You fear a man that ſhall die, and the ſon of man that ſhall be made as graſs; and doſt thou forget the Lord, thy Maker, that hath ſtretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth? The moſt that man can do, the greateſt evil all the men on earth can poſſibly inflict, is, to take away your life; they can kill the body, after that there is no more that they can do, but God is able to deſtroy both body and ſoul in hell, wherefore, ſays our Lord, "I ſay unto you, fear him." It is a comfort, that while we contemplate the almighty power of God; we can think of his power, as guided by conſummate wiſdom, and tempered with boundleſs goodneſs. Theſe attributes render this great and terrible Being, an object of eſteem and love. He is peculiarly amiable in the view which the goſpel gives us of him, reconciling the world

to himſelf by Jeſus Chriſt. Intereſted in the merits of the Redeemer, we may think of the omnipotence of God, with ſacred delight and joy, knowing that it will be imployed for our protection and advantage; and that we ſhall be kept, by the mighty power of God, through faith unto ſalvation.

Secondly, Doth the Lord God omnipotent reign? we learn, why the enemies of his church have not been able to prevail againſt it. It hath not been for want of thoſe who have had malice ſufficient, that the church of Chriſt hath not been overwhelmed and deſtroyed. But he that ſitteth in the heavens, and beholdeth all the children of men, hath reſtrained their wrath, and confounded their cruel deſigns. Under the protection of heaven, this little flock hath been preſerved, though ſurrounded by ravening wolves, and roaring lions. The word of God hath ſometimes grown mightily and prevailed. The power of thoſe who have oppoſed Chriſt and his cauſe, hath not been equal to their will, or chriſtianity had long ago been exterminated. Our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, having all power in his hands, conducts all things for the good of his church. None can proceed further than he permits them. He hath been the hope of his Iſrael; he hath not ſuffered his cauſe to ſink; and he hath promiſed, that the gates of hell ſhall not prevail againſt it. His church will continue, his cauſe will triumph, his ſaints will be joyful in glory; and all oppoſing powers will be confounded.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The conſideration of his univerſal dominion, ſhould lead us to make our grateful acknowledgments to the great Governor of the world, when things go well with us. Have we enjoyed many comforts in this life? Have we been preſerved when in danger? Have events, whether of a public or private nature, turned out favorably? And ſometimes beyond, or contrary to our hopes? We muſt not think a chance hath happened to us; but ſhould rejoice in the Lord, and give glory to his name. Whatever means we have uſed, however probable they were, yet the divine bleſſing hath made them effectual. You often ſee that the moſt probable means fail, while thoſe that are moſt unpromiſing are crowned with ſucceſs; this teaches us, that there is no neceſſary connection between the means and the end; and that all ſecond cauſes are in the hand of the great firſt cauſe. Let us then religouſly acknowledge the providence of God in every favorable event. Let us abundantly utter the memory of his great goodneſs, and ſing of his righteouſneſs. The goodneſs of God ought more deeply to affect us, becauſe we are infinitely unworthy of the leaſt mercy. Every favor ought to lead our thoughts to Jeſus Chriſt, that great, that unſpeakable, that comprehenſive gift, through whom every other good flows to us.

Fourthly, Since the government of the world is in ſo good hands, we ought quietly to ſubmit, when things are ordered contrary to our deſires

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and expectations. Whatever evils we meet with, we are ſure that as ſinners we deſerve them. The leaſt we can do is to be ſilent; Job went further; deprived of every thing, he ſays, "the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, bleſſed be the name of the Lord." It is no unreaſonable thing to rejoice in affliction; when we conſider that all is ordered by a Being of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, we juſtly conclude that what he doth is wiſe and good. Tho' we meet with trials that are hard to bear, yet if we are good men, we have reaſon to think, that it is beſt we ſhould meet with them. They are in covenant love, and are deſigned to make us partakers of the divine holineſs, and to prepare us for a better ſtate. "The Lord God is a ſun and ſhield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Fifthly, Doth the Lord God omnipotent reign, let us not be anxious about futurity, but let us commit all our concerns to him—To be diſtreſſed about what is to come, argues a diſtruſt of divine providence. It is certain, a reſtleſs anxiety cannot poſſibly be of any advantage. It will not alter the courſe of things, and it greatly unfits us for what we have to go through. It is indeed fit and right, to take a prudent care of our outward affairs, and to attend the duties of our ſtation; but all beyond this—is wrong, it is ſinful. Commit your works unto him, who hath the ſupreme diſpoſal of all things. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will

will direct thy paths. Undertake nothing without conſulting him ; and in proſecuting your lawful undertakings have his glory in view ; and remember, that ſucceſs, even in the common affairs and buſineſs of life, depends entirely on his overruling providence. Having committed your caſe to him, in ſerious fervent prayer, leave yourſelves with him ; ſubmit to his all-wiſe direction and diſpoſal ; ſaying, the Lord do that which ſeemeth him good. Having done this, in patience poſſeſs your ſouls ; you are ſecure under the protection of him, who hath all nature at his command. I pretend not to promiſe you exemption from outward trials. God may ſee them neceſſary to bring you to glory ; in which caſe, you are to place them under the head of mercies. Every thing is in mercy which tends to promote your ſpiritual good, your eternal welfare. Theſe will be your ſentiments, another day, whatever you think now.

If you are, and continue enemies to God by wicked works ; it is a tho't full of terror, that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth ; that he whom you have offended by your ſins is poſſeſſed of almighty power, and is able in ſuch a variety of ways to puniſh and deſtroy you. " The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble." The evils of this life are but a faint emblem of that amazing miſery which awaits the ſinner in another ſtate. It ought therefore to be your firſt and chief concern, to commit your ſoul into the hands of him, who is a-

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ble to keep that which you have committed to him againſt that day. Your great deſire ſhould be, that you may become true chriſtians, that you may have a title to the promiſes, and may be heirs of glory. To be indifferent here, and to be anxious about any temporal intereſt, is moſt unworthy ſtupidity. "Seek firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you." You are to ſeek *firſt* the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs, this ſuppoſes you are not to neglect other things. We have ſuch connections with this world, and ſuch neceſſary attachments to it, that we cannot but be affected with our ſituation here, whether it be proſperous or adverſe. Religion is ſo far from forbidding this, that it rather injoins it. It obliges us to praiſe God for mercies, and to be humbled under afflictions; to acknowledge our dependance upon him; and to commit our affairs to him. This hath been the practice of God's people in all ages, a practice which hath been attended with happy ſucceſs.

May God, by the diſpenſations of his providence, prepare us for that glorious place of reſt, where we ſhall be free from thoſe troubles and anxieties, which render this world ſo uncomfortable; where we ſhall have continual tokens of his love, and eternally ſolace ourſelves in the enjoyment of the CHIEF GOOD! Amen.

SERMON

SERMON V.

Charity more excellent than Faith or Hope.

1 Cor. XIII. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

IN the preceding verses the apostle Paul speaks of Charity in the highest terms. It far exceeded the gifts of the Holy Ghost, upon which the Corinthians valued themselves, and of which they were so ostentatious. "I shew unto you a more excellent way." This way was to pursue and cultivate that divine love, without which the most shin-

ing gifts, and the higheſt pretences to religion and a virtuous character, would be of no advantage.

In our text he makes a compariſon between charity or love, and the graces of faith and hope, and gives the preference to love. "Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, theſe three; but the greateſt of theſe is charity."

My deſign is to illuſtrate this paſſage of ſcripture under theſe three heads,

Firſt, I ſhall particularly conſider the graces ſpecified in my text.

Secondly, I ſhall enquire in what ſenſe they are ſaid to abide.

Thirdly, I ſhall ſhow that charity excells both the other, or is the greateſt of the three.

Firſt, I am to conſider the graces mentioned in the text, faith, hope, and charity, theſe three.

The firſt is Faith, a grace that is peculiarly celebrated in the New-Teſtament. "By faith the elders obtained a good report." Faith in general is an aſſent to, or perſuaſion of a truth propoſed to us, upon the authority and teſtimony of him who declares it. It relates to things that are not preſent,

ſent, or which are not the objects of our ſenſes. It ſuppoſes that we have credible evidence of their exiſtence, and therefore believe them to be. The evidence on which faith reſts is not always equally clear and certain, and therefore faith is not always equally firm. When we believe upon the teſtimony of men, we conſider them as fallible, and therefore the faith which is built upon it will not riſe to ſo high a degree, as when we believe upon the teſtimony of the God of truth.—The apoſtle plainly points out a very great difference between divine and human faith. † "For this cauſe alſo, thank we God without ceaſing, becauſe when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men; but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh alſo in you that believe." An aſſent is due to the word of men; but our aſſent to the teſtimony of God ſhould be anſwerable to his unqueſtionable veracity.

This divine faith, of which our text leads us to ſpeak, is an internal conviction of the truth of religion; and particularly of the ſcripture which is given by inſpiration of God. The firſt principle of all religion and of all faith is the exiſtence of a Deity. This great and fundamental truth, we cannot, indeed, be ſaid to believe on the teſtimony of God in his word, becauſe we muſt believe his exiſtence before we can receive a revelation from him.

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† 1 Theſſ. 2. 13.

We underſtand there is a God by the things that are made. But when we are ſatisfied that a revelation is from God, it is rational to believe whatever he therein declares concerning himſelf. As he perfectly knows himſelf, ſo he is capable of giving his creatures more juſt conceptions of his nature, than they can poſſibly form by the exertions of their own reaſon. We have in the ſacred ſcriptures, a clearer view of the nature, the character, the perfections of God, than men have ever attained, or than they are capable of attaining in any other way. The apoſtle ſays, "He that cometh to God muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him." The utmoſt length the light of nature can go, if it can go ſo far, is, that God will reward a creature who hath never deviated from the law of his nature, or from that conſtitution under which he was placed by his Creator. It affords no aſſurance that he will pardon a ſinner, or accept of any duty performed by him: Man therefore having ſinned hath little encouragement to repentance and obedience. Mere reaſon cannot remove his apprehenſions of puniſhment, or give him any reaſonable hope of good. All the expectation he can juſtly have of any reward, is founded on the manifeſtation God hath been pleaſed to make of himſelf in the goſpel. He hath in this gracious diſpenſation proclaimed his name, "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, tranſgreſſion and ſin." The faith, therefore,

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which hath reſpect to God in the character of a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him, is founded, ſo far as it hath any foundation at all, in divine revelation.

Chriſtian faith is a belief of the truth of the religion of Jeſus Chriſt, or an aſſent to the teſtimony which God hath given of his Son, who hath now in the end of the world appeared, to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf. The doctrine of a Mediator diſpels the clouds which ſurrounded the Deity, and diſcouraged our acceſs to him; it throws a light on the divine character, and raiſes the ſinner to the moſt glorious hopes. In the exerciſe of faith, the chriſtian receives Jeſus as a Teacher come from God to bear witneſs unto the truth, and to give his life a ranſom for all. He yields a firm aſſent to the hiſtory which the New-Teſtament gives of his ſpotleſs life, his miraculous works, his meritorious death, his triumphant reſurrection, and glorious aſcenſion into heaven, where he is exalted at God's right hand, to give repentance unto Iſrael and forgiveneſs of ſins. He carries his views beyond this world, and looks for a bleſſed ſtate of immortality. "Faith," as we are told by the writer to the Hebrews, "is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not ſeen." It gives as it were a preſent exiſtence to things hoped for, and is perſuaded of their truth and reality, though they are inviſible

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and future. This aſſent of the mind is not of the ſame kind with that which we yield to things ſeen, but it is as real, and according to the nature of the evidence on which is founded, it is as firm. It reſts upon the ſecurity of the divine promiſe, that the bleſſings promiſed will certainly be granted.

You obſerve, that I am ſpeaking, as I ſuppoſe the apoſtle doth in our text, of faith in a large ſenſe, and not of faith as it juſtifies a guilty ſinner. Juſtifying faith immediately reſpects Jeſus Chriſt, this faith reſpects all divine truth, the whole revelation of God. It includes juſtifying faith, but it comprehends a great deal more than is directly implied in that. I mention this to prevent miſtakes, though I am not certain there is ſo much reaſon for the diſtinction as hath been ſuppoſed.

The ſcripture doth not commonly denominate every cold and feeble aſſent to divine truth, faith. It certainly doth not, when it ſpeaks of it in terms of the higheſt approbation, and makes ſuch great promiſes to the believer. We read of believing "with the heart." † Faith conſiders what God hath revealed, not only as true, but as of the greateſt importance, and calculated to promote the moral perfection and happineſs of mankind, and therefore receives it with approbation and affection. When the apoſtle ſays " Faith is the evidence of things not

† Rom. 10. 10. Acts 8. 37.

not ſeen," the word he uſes, as critics have often obſerved, is exceeding ſtrong and emphatical, it ſignifies a clear conviction, an evident demonſtration,—" ſuch a kind of reaſon and argument, as both convinces the underſtanding, and engages a man to act according to that conviction." Faith gives divine truths a preſent ſubſiſtence, ſo that we taſte of their goodneſs, and experience their power influencing our whole temper and conduct. For this reaſon it is, that divines have generally taken conſent into their notion of faith; though this is not any part of faith in a ſtrict ſenſe, but rather an effect of it. The evangeliſt ſeems to lead us into this way of deſcribing faith, when he ſpeaks of receiving Chriſt and believing in him as one and the ſame thing. ¶ "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the ſons of God, even to as many as believe on his name."

Faith then in a goſpel ſenſe implies, that we receive Chriſt, and that we receive him in his whole character; that we ſubmit to his authority, conſent to follow his example, and rely upon him to conduct us to a ſtate of eternal happineſs. Many expreſſions in the New-Teſtament ſeem to intimate that faith is not an act of the underſtanding only, but of the will; therefore it is commanded as a duty, "This is his commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt." And unbelief is ſpoken

¶ John i. 12.

ſpoken of as a ſin, "He ſhall reprove the world of ſin, becauſe they believe not in me." Faith is a holy diſpoſition, a love of the truth, a principle of virtue and piety, it produces univerſal obedience, and influences thoſe who are poſſeſſed of it to yield themſelves up to Chriſt, to be for him, for him entirely, and without any reſerve.—It is no way material whether you take this conformity of heart to the truths you believe into your notion of faith. Moſt certainly, where there is not this conformity, your faith is vain, dead, and unprofitable.—Such a divine operative principle as this, hath a divine author, it is a grace of the Holy Spirit. "To you," ſaith the apoſtle, "it is given to believe."—This gracious habit, powerful as it is wherever it ſubſiſts, may be greatly ſtrengthened. Our Lord teaches his apoſtles to pray, "Lord encreaſe our faith."

Secondly, The next grace which our text leads us to conſider is, Hope.

Hope is, in general, a reaſonable expectation of ſuch things as we deſire; or, the ſatisfaction which the mind takes in the proſpect of them.—We call it an expectation, to diſtinguiſh it from ſimple deſire. We may deſire, may wiſh for many things, which we cannot hope to obtain.—It is an expectation of ſomething good, this diſtinguiſhes it from

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fear, which is an affection of mind oppoſite to hope. —We ſpeak of it as a reaſonable expectation; men ſometimes look for great good, when their expectation is only an airy flight of imagination; or, is built on a foundation that is falſe and deceitful. If this may be called hope; yet it is not that hope which is placed with faith and charity, which is encouraged by the God of truth, and is a grace of the Spirit. This bleſſed Spirit cannot be the author of deluſion; the views he preſents to our minds are agreable to truth; the deſires he excites are after a real good; the hopes he inſpires have a ſure foundation. This hope of the chriſtian is founded on the promiſe of God; and may reaſonably extend as far as the promiſe, but all he expects beyond this, is vague and uncertain. God is faithful who hath promiſed, who alſo will do it; but he is under no obligation to beſtow any good which he hath not promiſed, or to gratify any expectations which he hath not given reaſon for. Good men ſometimes deſire to be diſtinguiſhed in the world; to be in a ſituation of grandeur and opulence. I ſhall not undertake to determine how far ſuch deſires are lawful; but when a chriſtian entertains hopes of temporal bleſſings, however deſirable they may be in themſelves, or whatever encouragement he may take from ſome general expreſſions of ſcripture, he may find himſelf diſappointed, and his hopes fruſtrated. We have no warrant from ſcripture, to expect this or that particular

worldly emolument or diſtinction, which we, perhaps through ignorance or corruption, deſire or wiſh for; but we have ſufficient reaſon to hope for thoſe temporal bleſſings which God ſhall ſee to be for his glory and our good, without being able exactly to determine what thoſe bleſſings are; becauſe God hath promiſed that "all things ſhall work together for good to them that love him, to them that are called according to his purpoſe."

The chriſtian's hope being, as we juſt obſerved, founded on the promiſe of God, is converſant about things that are unſeen and future. What we now enjoy, we can with no propriety be ſaid to expect. We may hope for the continuance of a good which is now preſent, becauſe the continuance is a future thing; but ſo far as it is preſent, we do not hope for it. "Hope that is ſeen," ſays the apoſtle, "is not hope; for what a man ſeeth, why doth he yet hope for?" ‡ And therefore chriſtians are ſpoken of as looking "not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen." The great object of their hope is the perfection of their nature and happineſs in a future world. "This is the promiſe that he hath promiſed us, even eternal life."

This promiſe of an eternal ſtate of bleſſedneſs, includes in it whatever is neceſſary to fit us for that ſtate.

‡ Romans 8. 24.

ſtate. It contains all the particular promiſes of ſpiritual bleſſings which we find in the ſacred ſcriptures, of light to preſerve us from error, of ſtrength to mortify ſin, of power to reſiſt and overcome temptation, of aſſiſtance to practice the duties which God requires, of growth in grace, and perſeverance in a ſtate of holineſs. Having ſuch great and precious promiſes, a chriſtian may reaſonably hope for the bleſſings promiſed; even for all that grace which is neceſſary to prepare him for glory. But it is ſuppoſed, that he himſelf is alſo active and diligent. It is in the uſe of our endeavors, while we attend on the means of improvement, that God communicates his divine influence. If we ſo hope in the promiſes of God, as to think that there remains nothing for us to do, but that we may ſit at eaſe, and ſhall have the aids of the Spirit of God, whether we ſeek them or not, we abuſe the doctrine of grace, and diſhonour the goſpel of Chriſt. The promiſes of ſpiritual bleſſings always ſuppoſe that we are in ſome fit temper to receive them; that our graces do not lie dormant in the ſoul, but are in ſome degree of exerciſe. They are made to ſome virtue, ſome habit, ſome activity in us; "They that wait on the Lord ſhall renew their ſtrength; they ſhall mount up with wings as eagles, they ſhall run and not be weary, they ſhall walk and not faint." The doctrine of divine influence in forming our minds to virtue and holineſs, is ſo far from making our endeavours uſeleſs, that the apoſtle

apoſtle makes uſe of it as an incentive to diligence. * "Work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleaſure." And then only can we conclude our hope is a grace of the Spirit, and built on the promiſes, when it is accompanied with the moſt vigorous endeavors to be what God hath promiſed to make us, "He that hath this hope, purifieth himſelf as he is pure."

It affords unſpeakable relief, to a ſoul that is purified in any meaſure from ſin, that after this life, where he hath been called to ſo many conflicts, toſſed in ſo many ſtorms, and diſtreſſed with ſo many weakneſſes, he ſhall enter on a ſtate of perfect reſt, holineſs, and happineſs; and that his happineſs will be as durable, as it is great. When the chriſtian hath the witneſs in himſelf, that he is an heir of heaven, he may in ſome degree partake of the happineſs of that bleſſed place, and rejoice in hope of glory. He may have ſome prelibation of the joys of a future ſtate, from a perſuaſion of their reality, and a well-grounded hope of his intereſt in the Redeemer, and in the promiſes of God through him.

It is not every one who profeſſes to hope for heaven, that hath a title to it. Some have only "an uncertain fluctuating expectation of that which may be

* Philippians 2. 12.

be, or may not be."—Others are deceived in the foundation of their hope—There is the hope of the hypocrite which is as the ſpider's web, and will fail him when he hath moſt need of ſupport. That hope which is the effect of divine influence on our ſouls will never make us aſhamed. It ariſes from our perceiving in us the temper of heaven; and it tends to make us meet for the inheritance of the ſaints in light. It gives a new force to every ſpring of action, and powerfully urges us to preſs towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus. This "hope we have as an anchor to the ſoul both ſure and ſtedfaſt, and which entereth into that within the vail. Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jeſus made an High-Prieſt for ever."

I have now attempted to give ſome juſt notion of chriſtian hope.—It agrees with faith in this, that the object of it is unſeen; but they are very diſtinct graces.—They differ in their objects; it is true every thing that is an object of hope is alſo an object of faith; but we believe many things which we do not hope for.—Faith reſpects things that are paſt as well as thoſe that are future: Hope only thoſe that are to come. "Through faith" ſays the apoſtle, "we underſtand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." But the creation of the world is a thing we do not

hope

hope for.—Faith takes into its view both good and evil: Hope only things that are good.—Faith is converſant about the threatnings as well as the promiſes: Hope only about the promiſes.—Faith and hope are alſo different acts of the mind, where the object about which they are converſant is the ſame.—Faith is a perſuaſion, that what God hath promiſed, he will certainly accompliſh: Hope lays hold of the good that is in the promiſe, and in a ſort anticipates the enjoyment of it.—Faith is an aſſurance that God is true: Hope is the ſatisfaction which the mind hath in the proſpect of the happineſs which is promiſed.—Immenſely great is the bleſſedneſs which God hath provided for the children of men, and which is opened to us in the goſpel of Chriſt. This bleſſedneſs is future, we cannot at preſent be admitted to it; now faith gives it a ſubſiſtence in the mind, and hope in ſome degree enjoys it; it is a kind of fore-taſte of the happineſs of heaven.—The influence which ſo great bleſſedneſs ought in reaſon to have on men, is very much abated by its abſence and diſtance, how clear ſoever the promiſe. Theſe graces in ſome meaſure ſupply this defect, and in proportion to their ſtrength and activity, they will have the moſt happy effect; they will render us ſuperior to every worldly conſideration, and cauſe us to be holy in all manner of converſation.—Faith is the foundation; hope is the ſuperſtructure; and if the foundation be well laid, as it is when Chriſt and the promiſes

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are the baſis, we cannot raiſe our hopes too high; we cannot look, we cannot hope, we cannot wiſh for more, than God will in his appointed ſeaſon beſtow. Let us image to ourſelves, the greateſt good the human mind is capable of conceiving: Let us daily enlarge our views and deſires, the bleſſedneſs promiſed will far exceed our higheſt conceptions and largeſt deſires. "Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

The laſt grace mentioned in our text is Charity, or Love.

Now love is in general a benevolent propenſity or affection of the mind, proceeding from an apprehenſion of ſome excellency in the object, or ſome advantage which we receive from it. When this inclination is directed towards God, it is called love to God. When it is directed towards man, it is called love to man, or as it is expreſſed in the New-Teſtament, love to our neighbour, love to one another. Supreme love of God, and the ſincere love of man, are ſhed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghoſt; "the fruit of the Spirit is love." Mankind are too prone to be "lovers of their own ſelves" in a bad ſenſe, to be meanly and ſordidly ſelfiſh. How perfect ſoever God is in himſelf, however good he

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hath been to man, yet " the carnal mind is enmity againſt God." And with reſpect to man, " the ſpirit that is in us luſteth to envy." There may indeed be ſome kind of affection towards God, and a tender regard towards ſome of the human race, where there is no principle of religion : But that ardent, uniform, univerſal love, which chriſtianity ever recommends, is an emanation from him who is love and the fountain of love.

Some ſuppoſe that by love or charity in our text, the apoſtle intends only love to men ; this is undoubtedly the ſubject of which he had been treating in the preceding context, and to which it is likely he had a particular reference in this place. But when he ſpeaks of charity at large, and as a divine grace, it ſeems reaſonable to conclude we are to take in every thing that is an object of it ; and eſpecially love to God, which is the foundation of all virtuous love.

This love of God ſuppoſes juſt apprehenſions of his nature and perfections. A man may feel ſome emotions of ſoul towards God, ſome affection of heart, when he thinks of him as the Former and Preſerver of the univerſe, or when he ſurveys the beauties of the creation, and with what wonderful art all things are ordered for the convenience and comfort of man. His affection may riſe higher,

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when he is acquainted with the hiſtory of redemption ; when he is told how God hath pitied fallen man, and ſent his Son to be a propitiation for him. A lively deſcription of theſe things may melt his ſoul into tenderneſs and ſome kind of love. The great God, when ſet before him in this engaging light, may appear amiable. He may be ſorry he hath offended ſo good a Being, and may reſolve for the future to pay a proper regard to him. But all this time, he hath only a partial view of him, his contemplations are confined to the expreſſions of the divine goodneſs. When afterwards the Deity is repreſented in the glories of his holineſs, his rectitude, his power, however theſe perfections are ſoftened by goodneſs ; his heart riſes againſt the Being poſſeſſed of them, this is not the God he had been imaging to himſelf, his affection ceaſes, his deſires vaniſh. Whatever God is, whatever he does, muſt be taken into view, as far as we are capable, when we form our conceptions of him. If we love God, we muſt love his whole character. We muſt love him as a holy, a juſt, a powerful, as well as a good Being. 'Tis true, we cannot form too high ideas of his goodneſs, " God is love." But this is not his whole character, he is poſſeſſed of other perfections, which are as eſſential to him as goodneſs. And if we do not take theſe into our idea of him, the Being we conceive of is not God, whatever we aſcribe to him. 'Tis only an imagi-

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nary being, and our love is alſo imaginary : there is no ſuch object as we pretend to love.

You will not underſtand me as if we were not to love God for his goodneſs, this is a part of his character, and a part of it which is truly amiable. It is by no means to be excluded,but we are not to confine our thoughts to this, if we do, we do not love God, whatever emotions we feel, whatever affection we pretend. In like manner, if our love of God proceed only from a belief of his love to us,it is not that divine grace which the ſcripture ſpeaks of in ſo high terms. Some men, when they think of the inſtances of divine goodneſs to them, how God hath fed and clothed, protected and preſerved them, eſpecially if they imagine he hath ſet his love upon them, and made them heirs of the promiſes, are wonderfully moved with a ſenſe of the diſtinction which is made between them and others, and their affections are engaged to him who hath done ſuch great things for them. And this they call love to God, whereas it is only ſelf-love, or natural gratitude.

I am far from thinking that ſelf-love is a vicious principle, or that it is the deſign of religion to eradicate all regard to our own happineſs. On the contrary, we are bound to love ourſelves, and to do what we can to promote our own good, eſpecially

ſpecially our eternal felicity. The fault of the moſt is, that they neglect the care of their ſouls, and are too forgetful of that ſtate into which they are haſtening. The deſign of religion is not to deſtroy, but to regulate and ſanctify our love of ourſelves. Much leſs would I ſpeak contemptuouſly of gratitude to God for his goodneſs to us. Nothing is more baſe than ingratitude: it is odious when we are guilty of it to men; it is much more criminal when it terminates on the bleſſed God. You can ſcarce fix a worſe character on any one than to ſay he is an ungrateful man. When rightly exerciſed, gratitude is a virtuous principle, and a ſtrong evidence of a good heart. But when we think of nothing in God, but his goodneſs to us, and are ſo employed in contemplating our own excellencies, as to forget, or to take but a ſlight notice of the infinitely ſuperior excellencies that are to be found in him, it proves, not that we loveGod, but that we love ourſelves. Now though ſelf-love under proper regulations is not criminal, but right and fit, yet it doth not follow becauſe we love ourſelves that we certainly love God; if it doth, every one may be ſaid to love God, for "no man ever yet hated his own fleſh". Self-love is a natural principle, and if we advance no higher than nature, however it is improved, we have no reaſon to think we are born from above. A true chriſtian admires and eſteems all the divine excellencies, and can derive comfort and pleaſure from the moſt awful attributes

tributes of the Deity. He loves God for his holineſs as well as his goodneſs. He doth not argue that God is an amiable Being merely becauſe he hath determined to make him happy; for if he ſees no other excellency in the divine nature, whenever he doubts of his own good ſtate, he muſt doubt of the divine perfection. Whereas a ſincere chriſtian diſcerns an infinite excellency in God, however he may deal with him. He loves God, though he is not certain that his love proceeds from grace, and ſo cannot determine whether he is an object of divine love, whether he is in a ſtate of favor with God or not.

Love unites the mind to the object beloved; you ſee the men of the world eager in their purſuit of worldly enjoyments, their ſouls cleave to them, they follow hard after them, they are unwearied in their endeavors to obtain them, in this way they ſhew their affection to them. So the chriſtian thirſts for God, for the living God; his ſoul tends upward; he looks for reſt from him, and from him only; he rejoices that God is what he is, he doth not wiſh him to be any thing elſe; he ſees him to be an all-perfect Being; he deſires to be united to and to enjoy him; this is all the happineſs he expects; this is all the happineſs he wiſhes for; he loves God above all; he delights in him as the chief good; he loves him on account of his own infinite excellency, and on account of his goodneſs to the chil-

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dren of men ; he desires nothing besides him ; nothing in comparison with him ; nothing but what is consistent with a supreme affection to this greatest and best of Beings.

This love of God is an exercise of the mind, but it is not a merely silent contemplative affection, it sets every spring in motion, it leads to substantial acts of piety and obedience, it influences to all those practical expressions of love which we are capable of. " This is the love of God that ye keep his commandments."

Where there is true love to God, it produces as its genuine effect, love to mankind. The view of his perfect goodness and moral rectitude gradually changes the soul into a likeness to God. If we love a holy, righteous, good Being, we certainly love those qualities which form his character, and if we love these qualities, we shall endeavor to form ourselves by them, and to conduct agreably to them. Where there is a supreme love of God, there will be an hatred of an opposite character, and we cannot cherish dispositions in ourselves which tend to form a character to which we have a sincere aversion. One who takes his notions of God from the gospel, and hath an affection for him as he is represented there, cannot indulge to envy and wrath, malice and revenge. The amazing philanthrophy

lanthropy of God will ſoften all his paſſions, and influence to benevolence, kindneſs and love. A ſenſe of the divine goodneſs in ſending his Son to ſave man, in providing ſo great happineſs for thoſe who deſerved no favor at his hands, cannot fail to convince us of the excellency of goodneſs and charity even to the moſt unworthy; and muſt have a moſt wonderful efficacy to produce in us love to our brethren. "Hath God ſo loved us, and ſhall not we love one another,"—how concluſive the argument!—how forcible the motive!—What chriſtian can reſiſt it? In vain doth any one pretend to be ſwallowed up in God, or to have a ſupreme regard to him, who fails in this moſt natural expreſſion of love, which God alſo hath made the teſt and evidence of it. "If any man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath ſeen, how ſhall he love God whom he hath not ſeen."

The goſpel directs chriſtians to exhibit a ſpirit of love and benevolence to the whole human race; our bleſſed Maſter deſigned that every one within its reach ſhould feel the happy effects of his religion; that they, who would not embrace it themſelves, might partake of the goodneſs of thoſe who did.—Such is the genius of the goſpel—ſuch are the generous ſentiments it tends to inſpire. That our Saviour had theſe large views when he recommended love to his diſciples, is evident from his

parable

parable of the good Samaritan, which was designed as an illustration of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This command plainly supposes that a degree of self-love is fit and right, otherwise we should be cautioned to oppose and suppress it, and not to make it the rule and standard of our love to others. Indeed if self-love is always criminal, and we are to endeavor wholly to eradicate it, it seems hard to account for the promises and threatnings of the word of God, those powerful addresses to our hopes and fears, which are entirely useless principles in religion if we are to be divested of all love to ourselves. Pretences to an absolute disinterestedness are idle and imaginary, if no worse. It is what God never designed, what he hath not instituted any means to effect. We must be made new creatures in a physical as well as a moral sense, before we can attain to it.—But there is no need of using arguments to satisfy men that they may be lovers of themselves; they know it full well; too many are so confined to themselves as to forget their brethren, and to sacrifice every thing to what they imagine to be their interest. The great difficulty is to persuade them to love any beside themselves; to love their neighbours as themselves. *As*, when used by our Saviour in this precept, is a note of similitude and not of equality. Men will always have some special regard to themselves, but we are to love our neighbour sincerely and without any dissimulation;—our love

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to him ſhould bear ſome proportion to our ſelf-love—we ought to prefer his greater intereſt to our leſs, his ſpiritual to our temporal.

This love to our neighbour conſiſts in a ſincere benevolence towards mankind, and in a diſpoſition to expreſs our regard in all the ways we are capable of and have opportunity for. It implies a deſire of their beſt good, and all ſuitable endeavors to promote it, a univerſally kind temper and affectionate carriage towards them. A general account of this virtue, and the manner in which it is expreſſed, we have in the preceding context; "Charity ſuffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itſelf; is not puffed up; doth not behave itſelf unſeemly; ſeeketh not her own; is not eaſily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." This is the deſcription which the apoſtle gives of charity; and what an amiable! what an excellent grace is it! What a paradiſe would this world be, if it univerſally prevailed! as the want of it makes it a place of uneaſineſs and vexation. This deſcription is ſo full and and copious, that we need add nothing to it. Whoever anſwers the repreſentation which is here ſet before us, hath all that love which the goſpel requires. If he hath that command of his paſſions; that meekneſs and patience; that benevolence, good nature,

and

and condeſcenſion ; that candor, generoſity, and diſintereſtedneſs, which are here recommended. If he is free from envy and pride, is diſpoſed to entertain the moſt favorable thoughts of his neighbour, can rejoice in his good, and never ceaſes in his endeavors to promote it ; ſurely he cannot fail in thoſe expreſſions of eſteem and regard to all about him, which they have any right to expect, but will be ready to every act of kindneſs and office of love, according to their reſpective characters and circumſtances. He will love his neighbour as himſelf, and carefully attend every ſocial duty.

This charity is always to be exerciſed with prudence and wiſdom. Though it " believeth all things " and " hopeth all things," yet this is only where there is reaſon to believe and hope. Charity is not blind, nor doth it connive at wickedneſs. " It rejoiceth not in iniquity," but the charitable man to his ſorrow is witneſs of a great deal, and it is his endeavor according to his ſtation, capacity, and opportunity, to reclaim the vicious, to reduce the erroneous, to confirm the wavering, as well as to ſupport the afflicted, and relieve the indigent.

This chriſtian love, I have ſaid, extends to all mankind, but it is not exerciſed alike to all. Tho' all men have ſomething valuable in them, ſomething we ought to eſteem and love ; yet ſome have much more deſirable qualities than others. Some are wicked and ungodly, others reſemble God in

holineſs ; theſe latter are to be preferred in our offices of love : " The ſaints," ſays the pſalmiſt, " the excellent in the earth, in whom is all my delight." There are alſo ſocial inſtincts implanted in us by the Author of nature, to which he deſigned we ſhould attend, and which are neceſſary to keep the world in tolerable order ; ſuch is the mutual affection between parents and children, between thoſe of the ſame family, the ſame community, and the like. Theſe inſtincts of nature chriſtianity doth not condemn ; it rather encourages and ſtrengthens them. But though it is reaſonable we ſhould firſt take care of our own, our own relations and friends ; yet it is ſelfiſh and mean to confine our regard to them. If chriſtian charity begins at home, it doth not end there ; it is generous and diffuſive ; wherever there is an object, the charitable man eſteems himſelf bound to exerciſe his love. This law of charity our Saviour calls " a new commandment." Not that love was a new duty : it is a fundamental law of nature, and the ſpirit of every diſpenſation of God to mankind. But the noble ſenſe in which our Lord explained it was new to the Jews. It was literally a new commandment as He propoſed it, " A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." It was urged from a new motive, and enforced by a new example, the example of Chriſt, which ought to be moſt cogent with thoſe who profeſs themſelves his diſciples.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

Charity more excellent than Faith or Hope.

1 Cor. XIII. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.

I Endeavoured in the last discourse to give some account of the graces mentioned in the text.

I am now, according to the method proposed, to inquire in what sense these graces are said to abide.

Faith, hope, and charity are particularly mentioned, because they are very much at the foundation

tion of all moral rectitude. All other virtues of the chriſtian life are connected with and included in theſe. For inſtance,

I. Faith is neceſſary to the very being of religion or virtue. "Without faith," ſays the apoſtle, "it is impoſſible to pleaſe God; for he that cometh to God muſt believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him." What room for piety, unleſs we believe there is a God, an all-perfect Being, to whom we may addreſs our devotions, and yield our homage? How can there be virtue without a ſenſe of our obligation to the ſupreme Lord—a law without a law-giver? How can we imitate God, unleſs we form juſt notions of his perfections? The heathen had their "Gods many, and Lords many;" but the deities they feigned to themſelves, were impure, unjuſt, and cruel: And who could think they would be diſpleaſed with vices in their votaries, which they practiſed themſelves? Some, among thoſe who have been favoured with revelation, have entertained falſe, abſurd, and even wicked ſentiments of God—their practice hath been correſpondent, ridiculous, abſurd and wicked. We ſhall always form our notions of right and wrong according to the ideas we have of God. That will appear to us right and fit which we think agreable to the nature and will of the Deity whom we adore; and the contrary

will

will appear evil. That we might not fall into any miſtake, God hath in his written word revealed to us what he is, and what he requires of us. This is a diſtinguiſhing favor, "he hath not dealt ſo with" every "nation; and as for his judgments they have not known them."

The ſcripture teaches, that God is a Being of all poſſible perfection, that he is holy, juſt and good; that he is acquainted with every part of our moral conduct, that he hateth all the workers of iniquity, and that he is armed with omnipotence to puniſh them. What can have a greater tendency to deter men from ſin, and to excite them to the practice of univerſal holineſs, than a firm belief, an impreſſive ſenſe, of theſe great and important truths? A perſuaſion, that we are always in the preſence of this infinite Being, who gave us all our talents, and to whom we are accountable for our improvement of them, muſt have a moſt powerful influence on a rational mind; it muſt make us afraid of diſpleaſing him, and earneſtly deſirous of approving ourſelves to him. It may perhaps admit of diſpute, whether the will of man is always determined by the greateſt apparent good; or, which comes to the ſame thing, by the laſt dictate of the underſtanding. But however this point is decided, it muſt be granted by all, that there may be motives ſtrong enough to produce their genuine effect.

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It is ſcarce ſuppoſable, that a being poſſeſſed of a principle of ſelf-preſervation ſhould ruſh voluntarily on his own deſtruction ; or that he ſhould not chuſe to be happy rather than to be miſerable. The reaſon why men who profeſs to believe the great truths of religion do not act agreably, is becauſe their aſſent to them is feeble and uncertain. If a man was admitted to behold the glory of heaven, and actually ſaw the miſery of the damned, he would certainly endeavor to avoid the one and to obtain the other. This would undoubtedly be the effect, ſo long as there was any hope, that his endeavors would be crowned with ſucceſs.

But what ſhall the ſinner do ? Having broken the law of God, he becomes an object of juſtice, and can find no way of eſcaping the righteous judgment of God. His faith in God abſtractly conſidered cannot aſſure him relief. But in this extremity faith views Jeſus Chriſt ; it views him as ſet forth to be a propitiation, and contemplates the Deity according to the amiable repreſentation we have of him in the goſpel. Encouraged by the aſſurances of the word, a ſinner returns to God with his whole heart, and believing there is mercy with him, he engages in the work of repentance and univerſal obedience. Take away the views which the goſpel gives us of the bleſſed God, and the belief of a future ſtate, what have we to raiſe us a-

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bove this world? What encouragement to oppoſe our luſts? What excitement to virtue? If men die like the brutes, it would not be ſo abſurd in any to ſay, let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die. But when we conſider ourſelves as entering into an eternal ſtate, an eternity of happineſs or miſery according to the things done in the body, what a powerful incentive is it to a life of piety and holineſs!

It was their belief of a bleſſed immortality that ſupported the ancient patriarchs under their reſpective trials, and animated them to ſuch exalted piety and holy fortitude, as procured a moſt honorable teſtimony from God, and rendered them illuſtrious examples to the ſaints in all ages. "Theſe all died in faith," they received and entertained the promiſes of a future life, and the glorious proſpect carried them triumphant through the dark valley. But however ſtrong and eminent their faith was, the diſpenſation of Jeſus Chriſt gives us much clearer and fuller evidence of future life and immortality, than the ſaints had under the Old-Teſtament. So ſome underſtand the apoſtle, when he ſays "life & immortality are brought to light by the goſpel."¶ He doth not intend, that there was no evidence for the doctrine of immortality before the coming of Chriſt, but that the goſpel removed the doubts and

¶ 2 Timothy 1. 10.

and uncertainties in which this truth had been involved : it more plainly aſſerted, and more clearly revealed this fundamental article : and therefore the arguments uſed by our Saviour and his apoſtles for a life of purity and holineſs, are not ſo frequently taken from the preſent ſtate, as they were under the former diſpenſations; but we are directly pointed to another world, and taught to look not at the things which are ſeen, which are temporal, but at the things which are not ſeen, which are eternal. Under the influence of theſe great and precious promiſes, believers cleanſe themſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God ; they deſpiſe earthly things ; they purſue ſomething higher—ſomething better ; with Moſes they eſteem the reproach of Chriſt greater riches than the treaſures of Egypt, for they have a reſpect to the recompence of reward—" This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." But our faith being imperfect, the victory we obtain by means of it is imperfect alſo ; in proportion as we increaſe in this grace, we ſhall riſe ſuperior to earthly things, we ſhall be heavenly in our converſation.

II. As Faith ſo alſo Hope hath very great influence on our moral temper. Says the wiſe man, " hope deferred makes the heart ſick." What then muſt be the caſe, where there is no hope at all ? What but death and deſtruction ? " If thou Lord,"

Lord," ſays the pſalmiſt, "ſhouldſt mark iniquities, O Lord, who ſhall ſtand? But there is forgiveneſs with thee, that thou mayeſt be feared:" Plainly intimating that the only foundation of religious fear, is the thought that there is forgiveneſs with God. When a man hath no hope of the mercy of God, and the mind is ſunk into a ſtate of dejection and deſpair, there will be little or no ſpirit or ſtrength to reſiſt temptation, the unhappy wretch will rather abandon himſelf to vice, and gratify his luſts without controll. There have been ſuch awful inſtances of the fatal effects of this unhappy ſtate of mind, as ſhould make us very cautious how we yield to it. To think our caſe deſperate is the moſt effectual way to make it ſo.

On the other hand, when we view the bleſſed God in the light in which the goſpel places him, when we repreſent him to ourſelves as ready to receive and embrace the penitent returning ſinner, and to treat him with the tenderneſs and love of a father; when with faith and confidence we ſurvey the great and comprehenſive bleſſings which he allows and encourages us to hope for; how animating the conſideration! And what a tendency hath it to put us on ſeeking thoſe holy diſpoſitions, which are neceſſary to qualify us for the bleſſedneſs he invites us to partake of! When we not only firmly believe the promiſes, but by a lively hope enjoy beforehand the bleſſedneſs promiſed, it is

ſcarce poſſible but we ſhould preſs forward to that perfection, which is the end of our faith and the great object of our hope.

Beſides, as the chriſtian's hope, when it is a grace of the ſpirit, is not a merely uncertain fluctuating expectation of the good contained in the promiſes, but contains ſome degree of confidence that we have a title to this good, ſo it naturally produces a deep ſenſe of obligation to him who hath ſo greatly diſtinguiſhed us, and raiſed us to ſuch glorious hopes. And a juſt ſenſe of our obligations to the bleſſed God, will powerfully conſtrain us to love, ſerve and obey him.

Some indeed will tell us, that a perſuaſion of our good ſtate tends to make us indolent and careleſs. But if ſuch ingratitude is agreable to the conſtitution of human nature, it is human nature depraved and vitiated, and not corrected and ſanctified by the Spirit of God. When any are renewed by divine grace, their minds are in ſome good meaſure in a right ſtate; their views are rectified; they reaſon juſtly, and conduct with propriety. To ſuch as theſe, the experience they have had of the goodneſs of God, and the happineſs he hath provided for them, affords an almoſt irreſiſtable argument in favor of univerſal purity. The only reaſon any one can have to think he hath a title to the rewards of heaven,

heaven, is his finding in himſelf thoſe marks and characters to which the promiſe is made; the more viſible theſe marks are, ſo much the higher do his hopes riſe. The exerciſe of grace is the proper ſcripture evidence that we are in a ſtate of grace. When therefore a chriſtian doth not feel the power of religion in his ſoul, when he becomes ſlothful and inactive in the work of the Lord, he can have but little reaſon to think he is a child of God, or an heir of glory—His hopes neceſſarily vaniſh—and he muſt be deſtitute of that peace comfort and joy, which the promiſes of the goſpel tend to inſpire: If he attain to the bleſſedneſs of heaven at laſt, which he cannot be ſure of, he will have a lower ſeat there, than he would have had, if he had maintained a cloſe walk with God, and had lived in the uniform practice of holineſs and virtue. If theſe are not motives to the nobleſt improvements and higheſt attainments in the divine life, I know not what are. An aſſured chriſtian is moſt likely to be a growing chriſtian, he will naturally aim at further degrees of increaſe and proficiency. No one who is not ſatisfied of his intereſt in the promiſes can feel the force of the apoſtle's argument, with which he concludes his fine diſcourſe on the reſurrection—"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." †

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† 1 Corinthians 15. 58.

It appears by what hath been ſaid, that faith and hope are very much at the foundation of religion and virtue. They greatly tend to promote the chriſtian temper.

III. This is not leſs true of charity, the other grace mentioned in the text. This is the chriſtian temper itſelf; it is that to which faith and hope were deſigned to bring us. Where love is, there is every grace.

A ſupreme love of God being implanted in the ſoul, all other virtues ſpring from it. A chriſtian finds himſelf attracted to him as his centre. He knows no happineſs where God is not to be enjoyed. He thinks every thing evil which ſeparates him from this infinite good. He follows after him in all the ways of his appointment. He maintains a conſtant intercourſe with him in the retired exerciſes of devotion. He prizes the ordinances of the goſpel, and viſits with ſacred pleaſure the place where he hath recorded his name, and where his honor dwelleth. His duty is his delight; and to glorify his Father in heaven his higheſt gratification. Animated by this divine principle, he reſiſts every temptation, he abſtains from every evil practice, he walks with holy circumſpection, and aims at a perfect conformity to him who is the ſtandard of perfection.

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If we love God, we ſhall love Jeſus Chriſt. We ſhall love him as there is in him a perfect reſemblance of his heavenly Father, "being the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon." We ſhall love him, as he hath effected a reconciliation between God and man; and laid a happy foundation for our becoming the objects of divine love and complacency; as through him, we have a delightful proſpect of attaining a conformity to the moral character of the Deity, and to a ſtate of compleat bleſſedneſs in the everlaſting enjoyment of him.

If we conſider love in its reference to mankind, that univerſal benevolence, which the goſpel ſo warmly inculcates and ſo earneſtly recommends, will always lead to the practice of every ſocial virtue. It will keep us from every thing that would be injurious to our brethren; it will prompt to the moſt tender and affectionate carriage. Whatever duty we owe to our neighbour, in every ſtation and relation; whatever God requires us to do for our fellow men, or they can reaſonably deſire from us, is all contained in the law of love. "For he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not kill, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs, thou ſhalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy

ſelf.

ſelf. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour : Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Whenever our neighbour hath occaſion for our help, or we ſee an opportunity of ſerving him, if we have ſincere affection to him, we ſhall immediately embrace it. We ſhall not willingly harbour ill thoughts of him, or form deſigns againſt him ; much leſs ſhall we ſay or do any thing to his prejudice.

Thus I have ſhown how all other graces or duties are connected with or included in thoſe ſpecified in our text. They are the ſprings of all religion : If theſe ſhould ceaſe, all religious motion and activity would alſo ceaſe ; but if theſe graces are in us and abound, the happy effect will be, we ſhall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the work of the Lord. There is no branch of holineſs, which is not one way or another grafted on theſe cardinal virtues.

But we are to inquire not only why theſe graces are ſelected, but why they are ſaid to abide. It is probable this is ſaid to ſhew how much theſe graces excelled thoſe extraordinary gifts, of which he had been ſpeaking in the preceding chapter, and which were the occaſion of ſuch fierce contentions in the Corinthian church. Miraculous gifts were very uſeful in the firſt days of chriſtianity to rouſe mankind to attention ; the gift of tongues was peculiarly neceſſary, to enable the profeſſors of the goſpel to converſe

converſe with thoſe who were not acquainted with their native language. But uſeful as they were, they did not convey any excellence to thoſe who were poſſeſſed of them, nor were they always accompanied with inward purity. They were deſigned only for the preſent exigency, and were to be withdrawn when chriſtianity was eſtabliſhed in the world, and the ſacred canon was compleat. "Whether there be propheſies, they ſhall fail; whether there be tongues, they ſhall ceaſe; whether there be knowledge, it ſhall vaniſh away." But the caſe was very different with reſpect to the ſanctifying graces of the Spirit: Theſe gave men a real worth and excellency, and were to continue in all ages of the church. "Now abideth faith, hope and charity," thoſe three eminent graces which are neceſſary for the ſupport of true religion. If theſe ſhould fail, chriſtianity would be at an end; God would have no church in the world. Theſe virtues conſtitute the chriſtian character, and are the ſtanding marks of a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt. The leaſt degree of true piety and holineſs is to be preferred to the higheſt gifts. It was to be preferred to the extraordinary and miraculous gifts which were diſpenſed at the firſt promulgation of the goſpel; and there is a parity of reaſon, or rather, the reaſon is ſtronger, that true virtue or goodneſs ſhould be higher in our eſteem, than the moſt eminent gifts any one can arrive at in theſe days. Although therefore we may covet earneſtly the beſt

gifts

gifts that are now attainable, yet the goſpel ſhews us a more excellent way; namely, to cultivate a ſpirit of love, to ſeek a nearer reſemblance of the divine nature, and to ſecure a title to everlaſting glory and happineſs.

When the graces or virtues ſpecified in our text are ſaid to abide, it intends that they abide in every true chriſtian. It is not enough that they are to be found in the church, or in ſome particular members of it, as was the caſe with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; they muſt be in every one who profeſſes ſubjection to the goſpel, they are eſſential to a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt. He who hath not theſe graces, whatever he hath elſe, is nothing; he hath no excellency in the ſight of a holy God, and he hath no foundation for peace and comfort in his own mind. But if he is poſſeſſed of faith, hope and charity, though he is deſtitute of every other accompliſhment, he is in ſome meaſure what he ought to be; he is happy in the favor and love of God; and may rejoice with joy unſpeakable and full of glory.

Theſe excellent graces muſt not only be in us at ſome particular time, but they muſt abide. If we pleaſe ourſelves with the thought, that having once exerciſed the grace of faith, or of hope, or charity, we are now in a ſafe ſtate, and that there remaineth no more for us to do, it ſhows that we

are

are quite unacquainted with the nature of theſe excellent graces, and know not what true religion is. They are not ſo much particular acts of the mind, as gracious habits, and abiding principles of action, which muſt accompany the chriſtian through the whole of life. If he ſhould loſe his faith, he would loſe his religion, he could have no notion of duty, nor any ſenſe of obligation.—A chriſtian deprived of hope is weak as other men, he hath nothing to ſupport him under the difficulties and trials of life, or to encourage him in the purſuit of glory, honor, and immortality.—Love is the very eſſence of chriſtianity. There is not a greater contradiction in nature than a chriſtian without love: You may as well ſuppoſe a man without a ſoul, or a rational mind without ideas. It is ſo neceſſary, that if a diſciple of Chriſt ſhould become deſtitute of love, he would, in effect, be in the ſame ſtate he was in before he was a diſciple. He would not be a chriſtian, whatever he had been, or might now profeſs. The promiſe of God, that chriſtians ſhall inherit eternal life, includes a promiſe to ſecure them from loſing thoſe gracious diſpoſitions which are neceſſary qualifications for it. Nor may we content ourſelves with any ſuppoſed habit of faith, hope, and love; we ſhould keep them in continual exerciſe, and in this way they will continually grow and increaſe, till we arrive at the fulneſs of the ſtature of perfect men in Chriſt Jeſus.

It is generally ſuppoſed, that when the apoſtle ſays, "Now abideth faith, hope and charity," he intends, that faith and hope are to ceaſe with this life, whereas charity never faileth. This is not ſaid, and ſome interpret the words quite otherwiſe. They conſider them as connected with the preceding verſe. "For now we ſee through a glaſs darkly; but then face to face: Now I know in part; but then ſhall I know even as alſo I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, theſe three; but the greateſt of theſe is charity." i. e. ſays Mr. Lock, "Now we ſee but by reflection, the dim, and as it were enigmatical, repreſentation of things; but then, when we ſhall be got into a ſtate of perfection in the other world, we ſhall ſee things directly, and as they are in themſelves, as a man ſees another when they are face to face. Now I have but a ſuperficial, partial knowledge of things, but then I ſhall have an intuitive, comprehenſive knowledge of them; as I myſelf am known, and lie open to the view of ſuperior ſeraphic Beings, not by the obſcure and imperfect way of deductions and reaſoning. But then even in that ſtate, faith, hope and charity will remain; but the greateſt of theſe is charity." 'Tis moſt certain, that many things will be the objects of faith to the ſaints, when they arrive at a ſtate of perfection in heaven, as well as while they continue on earth. For inſtance, they muſt believe things that are paſt, and which will not then be the objects of their ſight: They muſt

believe

believe the promiſe of God, that their happineſs ſhall not ceaſe, but ſhall continue and increaſe thro' eternity. They muſt hope for the good that is to come, for the enlargement of their capacities, and the everlaſting ſatisfaction of all their deſires.— "There will," ſays Dr. Guyſe, "ever be a firm perſuaſion of the truth of all that God ſhall make known in that ſtate, and an entire truſt and confidence in him, for the endleſs perpetuity of all poſſible bleſſedneſs; and ſeparate ſpirits there will, doubtleſs, live in an aſſured hope and expectation of the reſurrection of the body, together with all the glory, which will attend that final manifeſtation of the ſons of God." In this view of things, faith and hope will remain, as well as charity, to eternity. But faith and hope will be very different from what they are now, and will anſwer very different ends, ſo that it is by no means certain, that the common interpretation is not a juſt one, as I may more particularly ſhow hereafter.

I ſhall leave the conſideration of the other propoſition to ſome future opportunity—And ſhall conclude at preſent with one or two reflections.

In the firſt place, May it not ſerve for a great leſſon of humiliation, to conſider how ſmall a degree we have of thoſe excellent graces, which are of ſo much importance in the chriſtian life? Is it not owing to a defect here, that we have ſo little of the ſpirit of religion, and are ſo negligent in the practice of it? That a cold indifference and unworthy

worthy ſloth prevail in a cauſe that calls for all our zeal and activity? That ſo many prefer the things of time to thoſe of eternity? The mean enjoyments of ſenſe, to thoſe rational and divine pleaſures which the goſpel opens to our view? Theſe are often the ſorrowful complaints of good men when they reflect on the ſtate of things in general; and which I fear we have all particular reaſon to make, when we reflect on ourſelves. Were we ſenſible of our ſinfulneſs, indigence, and guilt—did we entertain juſt conceptions of the goodneſs of God, and the kind proviſion he hath made in the goſpel for our relief, certainly we ſhould immediately repair to Chriſt the kind Saviour of men for relief and ſafety, we ſhould ſubmit to him, and rely upon him, in all thoſe characters and offices which he ſuſtains for the benefit of the children of men—Had we a powerful conviction of the great truths of religion, and did we maintain a conſtant pleaſing ſenſe of the perfections of God, we ſhould not be ſo eaſily moved with every temptation, we ſhould aim at being imitators of God as dear children, we ſhould watch over our thoughts, our words, our actions—Had we a joyful well-grounded hope of that bleſſed immortality which the goſpel promiſes, we ſhould not be ſo anxious about earthly things; we ſhould not find it ſo difficult to endure the trials and ſufferings of the preſent ſtate; we ſhould be contented with the diſtributions of Providence, and reſigned to the will of the all-wiſe diſpoſer; we ſhould commit

ourſelves

ourſelves into his hands, and be willing he ſhould take his own way to conduct us to glory—Did the love of God reign in our hearts, we ſhould chearfully obey all his commandments, our duty would be our delight, and it would be our meat and drink to do the will of our Father in heaven. When we have a peculiar affection to our fellow-men, we can go through any thing to ſerve them. We think we can never do enough for our children and friends. Oh! with what alacrity ſhould we practiſe the moſt difficult duties, if we had that ſincere, that ardent, that ſupreme love which he ſo infinitely deſerves, and ſo juſtly requires from us—Finally, were we poſſeſſed of that univerſal undiſſembled benevolence to our brethren, which is the peculiar character of a diſciple of Chriſt, ſhould we not carefully ſuppreſs every angry, every envious, every unkind thought which begins to riſe within us? Should we not do good to all within our reach? and eſpecially to the friends and diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt?—Happy the man who hath not reaſon to condemn himſelf in any of theſe inſtances, he may juſtly rejoice in God, and be perſuaded that all is, and will be well with him.—But have not we reaſon rather to rejoice, that God is not ſtrict to mark our imperfections, and that there is a way, in which we who ſo often offend, and always come ſhort of thoſe attainments we ought to make, may find pardon and acceptance? Doth it not become us to receive, with humble gratitude, the bleſſed report of the goſpel; and to

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rely on the merits of him whom God hath exhibited as a propitiation ?

Secondly, Of how great importance is it to be poſſeſſed of thoſe graces which are at the foundation of all religion and virtue ! We are concerned to have the character of chriſtians, it becomes us to be more ſollicitous to have thoſe principles, without which we ſhall be only as " ſounding braſs and a tinkling cymbal." Faith, hope and charity, are neceſſary both to our ſafety and comfort. They are all graces of the Spirit of God. It is true, the arguments in favor of divine truth, ought to be ſufficient to gain the aſſent of a rational being, and to produce a correſpondent practice : But we are naturally inattentive to the truths of religion, and do not feel their importance, till they have ſuch a preſent ſubſiſtence in our minds, as can be the effect only of divine influence. It ſhould therefore be our earneſt and conſtant prayer, that the God of hope would fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope thro' the power of the Holy Ghoſt ; and that he would ſhed abroad his love in our hearts. This will make the preſent world, inſtead of a vale of tears, a place of reſt and happineſs. This will cauſe us to glory in tribulation, to triumph in death, will be a foretaſte of heaven, and an earneſt of our admiſſion there.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

Charity more excellent than Faith or Hope.

1 Cor. XIII. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greateſt of these is charity.

IN ſpeaking to theſe words I propoſed, Firſt, To conſider the graces here particularly ſpecified.

Secondly, To enquire in what ſenſe they are ſaid to abide.

Thirdly, To ſhow that Charity excells both the others, or is the greateſt of the three.

It

It is the laſt of theſe that now comes under conſideration, viz.

To ſhow that Charity excells Faith and Hope, or is the greateſt of the three.

This is by no means ſaid to put a ſlight on theſe other graces; or to ſet them in a diminutive point of light. They are placed, you ſee, in the higheſt claſs—theſe three are the moſt eminent of all the virtues which adorn the chriſtian. But love is the moſt excellent of all—It is greater than faith, that neceſſary and important grace, of which the New-Teſtament ſpeaks ſo highly, and to which it aſcribes ſuch great things—It is greater than hope, that pleaſant and comfortable grace, which affords the mind ſuch vaſt ſatisfaction, which is ſo neceſſary to ſupport us under the trials, and to quicken us to the duties of the chriſtian life. So the apoſtle tells us, "the greateſt of theſe is charity."

Faith and hope are great and important graces, but charity is ſtill greater. What makes this a little ſurprizing, to ſome who look but a little way, is, that they have a very ſuperficial and contracted view of charity. They conſider it as a virtue, which leads us to think well of our neighbour, and now and then to do him an act of kindneſs. Whereas theſe are only ſome of the ſmaller branches of charity.

charity. They may proceed from the principles of nature. Charity is a divine grace implanted in the ſoul ; which extends as far as there are any ſuitable objects. It hath reſpect to every thing that is amiable, and to nothing elſe. It is true, they who are poſſeſſed of this grace often find their affections drawn out to objects that are in themſelves mean, baſe, and unworthy their love : But this is becauſe good men have a great mixture of ſin and imperfection while in this life. So far as love is a grace of the Spirit, it implies that we have juſt views of things, and are ſuitably affected towards them. God who is the greateſt and beſt of beings is the firſt object of eſteem and affection, and our love is placed upon others, in proportion as they reſemble him, and we are connected with them. Of conſequence we ſhall love Jeſus Chriſt above all things in heaven or in earth, as there is in him the brighteſt reſemblance of the Deity. This divine love unites the heart to the whole human race; it includes a ſincere affection to mankind, and a diſpoſition to promote their good. It wiſhes well to all; it eſteems thoſe who are worthy of eſteem ; it hath delight in thoſe who have any thing delightful in them ; and expreſſes itſelf in ſuch ways as it ſees reaſon and hath opportunity for. It is not a ſingle act, much leſs doth it conſiſt in external actions. It is a gracious habit—a divine affection—a benevolent propenſity—which is exerciſed whenever an object preſents, towards God ſupremely, towards man uni-

verſally, towards both ſincerely. Our Saviour ſpeaks of it as the ſum of all religion. "Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind; this is the firſt and great commandment—and the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf. On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."† Love comprehends the whole of the religion taught, and the duty required, in the law and the prophets. It is the root from which all that is good proceeds. We perform no duty aright where there is not love. No wonder, when we conſider charity in this large ſenſe, that the apoſtle ſpeaks of it in ſuch high terms, as greater than either faith or hope—It is more perfective of human nature—It is the end to which the other graces were deſigned to bring us—It remains when they in a good meaſure ceaſe and fail.

Firſt, Love is moſt perfective of human nature. It renders us moſt like to God in dignity and happineſs. Faith and hope, neceſſary as they are for us, do not in themſelves aſſimilate us at all to the Deity. There is no room for either of theſe, or for any thing like them in the all-perfect Being—Faith is credit given to ſomething which we know not of ourſelves, upon the authority of another; what a perſon knows, he cannot with propriety be ſaid to believe. But "who hath directed the ſpirit of the Lord, or being his counſellor hath taught him? With

† Matt. 22. 37, 38, 39, 40.

With whom took he counſel, and who inſtructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowlege, and ſhewed to him the way of underſtanding ?"† The great God takes all things paſt preſent and future into one comprehenſive view, all actual and all poſſible exiſtence. Univerſal truth is open before him—This glorious Being enjoys perfect unmixed felicity. He cannot be greater, better, or happier than he is, becauſe he is eſſentially as great, as good, and as happy as he can poſſibly be. And as he is what he is by neceſſity of nature, ſo he is invariably the ſame. He hath nothing therefore to hope or to fear—Both faith and hope imply ſome imperfection. Faith ſuppoſes that the ſubject of it hath not a perfect view of things, that he needs the teſtimony of ſome other to convince him of a truth propoſed.—Hope ſuppoſes there is ſome good we do not enjoy, and which we expect to attain—The eſſential knowlege and happineſs of God takes away all poſſibility of the exiſtence of theſe graces in him—But love is a glorious perfection of the Deity.

What but love or goodneſs could move the great Firſt Cauſe to produce the creatures which he hath formed? He could have no other motive than to exerciſe the infinite benevolence of his nature, and that propenſity there is in him to do good. As all his intelligent creatures were formed with a capacity of happineſs, ſo happineſs was provided for them

† Iſa. 40. 13, 14.

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ſuited to their capacity. The goodneſs of God was particularly diſplayed in the formation of man, it was viſible in the ſtructure of his body, but more in the nature of the human ſoul, in his capacity of enjoyment, and in the good deſigned for him. When man had fallen from God, the goodneſs of God was ſtill apparent, yea, the miſery of man afforded occaſion for the diſplay of his infinite grace. It was this, which brought the Son of God from heaven, clothed him with human fleſh, and cauſed his bloody ſacrifice. This is the ſource of all the wonders of redeeming love. "In this was manifeſted the love of God towards us, becauſe that God ſent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."* Every part of this amazing ſcheme ſhows that God is good—that he is love. The appointment of a Saviour to relieve creatures ſo infinitely unworthy—The perſon conſtituted to be the Mediator—The ſufferings he underwent to procure our ſalvation—The bleſſed ſtate of immortality to which the goſpel was deſigned to raiſe us.

Love is that perfection which God hath delighted to honor. When Moſes made that requeſt, "ſhew me thy glory;" he anſwers, "I will make all my goodneſs paſs before thee."¶ And the apoſtle not able to expreſs the greatneſs of divine love, ſays, "God is love."† It is not ſaid, love is a perfection

* 1 John 4. 9. ¶ Exodus 33. 19. † 1 John 4. 8.

perfection of the divine nature, or God hath great love, but "God is love." Love is his very nature, his eſſence, he is all love. God is often ſaid in ſcripture to be wiſe, to be holy, to be juſt; but this form of expreſſion is never uſed concerning any other perfection. He is not ſaid to be holineſs, juſtice, or wiſdom, but he is ſaid to be love; as if this property of the divine nature was more intimately eſſential to it than any other. His ſupreme delight is in himſelf, becauſe he is moſt capable of affording ſatisfaction to his own infinite mind. And for the ſame reaſon, he loves his own image wherever he is pleaſed to impreſs it. He loves the angels who reſemble him in his moral character. He loves all the children of men; but he loves them with a ſpecial diſtinguiſhing love, who are renewed in the ſpirit of their minds, and are holy in any meaſure as he is holy.

We ſee a great deal of the goodneſs of God now, we hope for ſtill higher expreſſions of it hereafter. When the chriſtian thinks what God hath done, and contemplates on what he hath promiſed to do, he cries out with aſtoniſhment, What manner of love is this! But how little do we know in the preſent ſtate, in compariſon with what we ſhall know, and taſte, and feel, when we ſhall no longer ſee through a glaſs darkly—when we ſhall arrive at that bleſſed ſtate of perfection which the goſpel

encourages

encourages us to look and hope for—when there will be no fatherly corrections mingled with the expreſſions of divine love—when we ſhall meet with nothing which ſeems contrary to it—nothing which tends to raiſe objections in our minds againſt it—when God will manifeſt himſelf and his grace in a way beyond and above our preſent conceptions.—When we, on the other hand, ſhall have no mixture of darkneſs, imperfection, or ſin, which as ſo many clouds intercept our view of the Deity, prevent our forming juſt conceptions of him, and our diſcerning goodneſs, where, but for the weakneſs of our minds, it would be moſt clear and evident. Then ſhall we perceive, without the leaſt intervention of a doubt, that God is good; yea, that he is goodneſs itſelf.

From what hath been ſaid, it is evident, that when love reigneth in the ſoul, there is a reſemblance of the bleſſed God, who is the ſtandard of perfection. The more full we are of love, the more we are like him. This grace creates a reſemblance more than any other. Goodneſs is the peculiar glory of his nature, and to be like God is the greateſt glory of our's. Love is a ray from the Father of lights—a beam from the Sun of righteouſneſs—It is an emanation from the Deity, and makes us partakers of the divine nature.

How

How excellent! how glorious! do the holy angels appear, according to the account we have of them in ſcripture, who are full of love. They have the cleareſt views of the Deity—They are wrapt up in contemplation on the infinite excellency of his nature—They admire, venerate, and adore that Being whom they cannot comprehend—They ſee a glory in all God does—They diſcern a beauty, a harmony, a goodneſs, in all his diſpenſations. And they often expreſs their admiring ſentiments, in devout anthems and lofty alleluia's—They praiſe God for what he is—They give thanks to him for making them capable of enjoying any degree of his infinite happineſs—They bleſs God when they ſee others as happy as themſelves—Yea, when the good of other beings is made to exceed their own.—They know not what it is to envy their ſuperior bleſſedneſs—This is ſo far from diſturbing their peace, that they derive happineſs from the happineſs of others. It increaſes their joy that their fellow-creatures partake of it. We read that when God laid the foundations of the earth, "the morning ſtars ſang together, and all the ſons of God ſhouted for joy."† Thoſe benevolent ſpirits rejoiced, that God was about to communicate more of his goodneſs; and that there were like to be other beings to partake of the happineſs which they felt. So entirely diſintereſted, ſo generouſly diffuſive is their goodneſs! From the ſame amiable temper, they chearfully ſtoop to become miniſtring ſpirits

† Job 38. 7

to

to mankind. They run—they fly—in obedience to their almighty Lord; and they delight to be employed in acts of kindneſs and love. They encamp around us—They keep us in our way—They redeem us from evil—They ſincerely rejoice when a ſinner repenteth—They excite us to good—They convoy the ſouls of the bleſſed to the manſions of reſt which are prepared for them—and they delightfully mix in the ſociety, and in the praiſes of the glorified ſaints. In the Jeruſalem which is above, there are "an innumerable company of angels," as well as "the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect."† How pleaſingly illuſtrious! are theſe bleſſed ſpirits, while they are continually employed in acts of love; and without regret do a multitude of kind offices to creatures ſo much inferior to them! In what view could they appear greater or better, than while they imitate God in this amiable perfection of his nature? We can think of their ſtrength, their knowledge, their wiſdom, without any ſenſible emotion; but when we contemplate on them, not only as wiſe and powerful, but as good, as made up of goodneſs, and that all their acts of goodneſs ſpring from love to their great Creator and Lord, then we eſteem, then we love them. This gives them a real excellency, this conſtitutes their true glory. And thus glorious, thus excellent ſhall we be, in proportion as we are poſſeſſed of that divine temper, which gives ſuch a luſtre to the angelic nature. How

† Heb. 12. 22, 23.

How truly excellent is he, who finds the love of God governing his whole ſoul, and carrying him above all created good, and at the ſame time, deſcending " in a regular ſubordination from God upon the creature" ! and who always acts agreably to this inward propenſity, this heavenly affection ! Such a temper and ſuch a conduct conſtitute the true dignity of human nature, and are well ſuited to the ſuperiority which God hath given us in his creation. Can any thing be more fit and right, than that we ſhould have a ſupreme love of him, in whom centres every thing that is great, every thing that is good, every thing that is neceſſary to abſolute perfection ? This is one of the firſt dictates of reaſon, the firſt duty of a rational creature. The argument holds, that we ſhould love all other beings, in proportion as there is any thing lovely in them, or which comes to the ſame thing, in proportion as there is in them a reſemblance of God. Indeed our love is not to be confined to the virtuous and holy. Theſe, it is true, ought to be firſt in our affection ; but if we would be the children of our Father in heaven, our benevolence muſt reach to all, the evil as well as the good, the juſt as well as the unjuſt. The example of this all-perfect Being ſhould be a ſufficient incentive to this univerſal charity. But there are many other motives. Mankind are all our brethren, children of the ſame father ; they partake of the ſame nature ; they have all immortal ſouls, capable of being for-

ever happy, but in danger of everlasting misery. Our wants, our dangers, our hopes, our fears are in general the same, for we ourselves are also in the body, and we ought to do to them, as we should reasonably expect they would do to us, if we were in their situation and they in our's. A change of circumstances is not uncommon in this mutable state, and we may greatly need their help who now ask relief from us. But our love is most like the love of God, when it proceeds from a principle of pure benevolence, and we have no prospect of advantage, at least of none in this life. Such love, in some degree, human nature is capable through grace of attaining, and the more we possess of this excellent spirit, so much the nearer do we approach towards perfection.

Love adds a lustre to every other quality. Look upon a monarch, who hath arrived at great power, amassed large treasures, and acquired extensive knowledge, but is destitute of goodness, hath no tenderness for those who are under him, no desires to promote their welfare : What is his dignity ? it resembles that of the prince of the power of the air, who hath a great capacity and ability, but improves it all to disturb the universe, and to injure the creatures of God. Such an one is an object of abhorrence and not of respect ; his exalted station only makes his crimes more conspicuous, and his person more detested. But let a prince to his other

eminent

eminent qualities join that of goodneſs, a love to mankind, a deſire to do them good ; let him improve his power and influence to make others happy, how juſtly is he ſtiled a benefactor ? Every one is charmed with his diffuſive benevolence, he reigns in the hearts of his ſubjects, and his goodneſs makes ſuch impreſſions as will never be eraſed.

Look on our bleſſed Redeemer, who never aſſumed the honors of this world, who lived a private and deſpiſed life, but went about doing good, was ever ſollicitous to ſerve the bodies and ſave the ſouls of men, and after enduring the moſt unparalleled ſufferings ſubmitted to death for us ſinners ; conſider him only while he was "found in faſhion as a man," how much more illuſtrious doth he appear, than the great and mighty conquerors, who deſtroyed cities, overthrew kingdoms, and waded through torrents of blood, that they might extend their dominions, and encreaſe the number of their vaſſalls! This honor hath every chriſtian, ſo far as he is poſſeſſed of the temper, and imitateth the example of the bleſſed Jeſus. Every approach to that truly divine love which was perfect in him, raiſes his diſciples to a proportionable degree of excellency and dignity. It makes them honorable in the eyes of men. Even bad men cannot but value a virtue which is ſo beneficial to the world, unleſs by it the good man eclipſes them, where they would be tho't to excel. Men of religion honor them as they reſemble

ſemble that glorious Being who is the great object of their affection and eſteem. "For a good man ſome would even dare to die." But, which principally deſerves notice, they are honorable in the ſight of God, whoſe approbation is of more worth than would be that of the whole intelligent creation. It is more to be valued in itſelf, and it hath infinitely more important conſequences. He hath graciouſly connected ſome degree of pleaſure and inward ſatisfaction with this excellent ſpirit in this life, and he will glorioufly own and reward the charitable man in another world.

They who are poſſeſſed of this divine love feel a ſacred reſt and peace, which the world can neither give nor take away. When their love is fixed immediately on God, the mind ever finds enough to yield the moſt exquiſite pleaſure, the moſt raviſhing delight. It finds itſelf loſt in pleaſing contemplation on the divine excellencies, they are ſo tranſcendent—ſo infinite. The more we think of God, the more deſerving he appears to be of our love, till at length creature delights vaniſh, or become too contemptible for our notice. A ſoul that hath juſt ſentiments of God, and a holy love to him in exerciſe, cannot be greatly diſturbed with the loſs or want of theſe things, becauſe they are not the principal objects of his deſire. If he may have God for his portion, he is content, though he have nothing elſe;

and

and can join, in ſome degree, with the pſalmiſt, in his holy tranſport of joy and exultation, ‡ "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I deſire beſides thee." He would give up riches, honors, friends, every earthly enjoyment, which comes in competition with his God: He eſteems them, when compared with this infinite good, nothing, leſs than nothing, and vanity. Filled with the love of God, he accounts none of his commandments grievous; he performs them with ſacred delight and ſatisfaction; Chriſt's yoke is eaſy and his burthen light. He deſires perfection in holineſs, and he preſſes after it; he mourns that ſin is ſo prevalent within him; he watches, he ſtrives, he prays againſt it; and he rejoices in the thought that heaven is an holy place, and that there he ſhall be perfect, as in love, ſo in univerſal holineſs.

Such diſcoveries of God, and ſuch exerciſes of divine love, are not experiences, which we may, as it were, gaze at and long for in a diſtant proſpect. Many, many, have been thus highly favoured. This carried the martyrs triumphantly thro' their ſufferings; they felt that love to God and deſire to be with him, which made them take pleaſure in thoſe tortures, which ſhortened the time when they ſhould

‡ Pſalm 73. 28.

ſhould be abſent from the body, and preſent with the Lord. This hath ſometimes raiſed the ſaints above the things of time and ſenſe, and cauſed them to live a heavenly life while they remained on earth. They have found the ways of religion to be ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths peace. The allurements and temptations of the world have loſt their force, and for a time the attempts of Satan have been fruitleſs and vain. Have we never, in our ſacred retirements, found the love of God ſhed abroad in our ſouls to ſuch a bleſſed degree, as that, although we were not taken up, as St. Paul was, to the third heaven, yet we have forgotten that we were inhabitants of this earth, and have been able with thankful admiration to contemplate, "and to know the love of Chriſt, which paſſeth knowledge." ? Can you recollect ſuch precious moments ? Say, my beloved brethren, did you ever find any earthly pleaſures equal to them ? any to be compared with them ? It is for want of this ſupreme love to God, or a more ardent exerciſe of it, that we enjoy ſo little true happineſs, and that we ſeek it in the enjoyments of this life which are not capable of yielding it. In the language of inſpiration, we "have forſaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed out ciſterns, broken ciſterns, that can hold no water."

When

When this love to God evidences itſelf in love to men, it is impoſſible to expreſs the ſatisfaction which the charitable man enjoys. To feel no envious, no malicious, no angry thoughts towards our neighbour, to lay aſide revenge, to return good will for hatred, to wiſh well to all, to do good to all as we have opportunity, to be able and willing to communicate happineſs to our fellow-creatures, to find ourſelves engaged in ſincere and earneſt addreſſes to heaven, even for thoſe who have injured and abuſed us, what a divine calm! what ſeraphic pleaſure muſt it yield to the mind! "No ſimilitude drawn from earthly things can adequately repreſent it. It is itſelf, not only an emblem of heaven, but the very foretaſte of that ſerenity of ſoul which is the happineſs of juſt men made perfect." How bleſſed is the man, who can rejoice in his neighbour's good as in his own! Such an one, in a ſenſe, partakes of all the good the all-bountiful God beſtows: And how is his pleaſure encreaſed, when he is employed to convey any part of it to others! It is a ſaying of our divine Maſter, happily preſerved by St. Paul, "it is more bleſſed to give than to receive." † "The poor receiver," ſays one, "thinks himſelf happy, the bountiful giver certainly is ſo, the latter is the greateſt gainer." Charity is it's own reward. It affords unſpeakable delight to the mind, and raiſes our nature to the higheſt dignity.—It makes us feel, I ſpeak with humble reverence, ſomething of the happineſs

† Acts 20. 35.

which

which the bleſſed God enjoys, who is good and doth good. It anticipates the bleſſedneſs of heaven. It yields joy which a ſtranger to this divine grace cannot conceive, and which the charitable man cannot utter. ¶ "Amongſt the many refinements upon pleaſure, which this polite age hath produced, it is a wonder to me," ſays an elegant modern writer, "that ſo few have hit upon this of relieving the poor; (one principal branch of the grace I am ſpeaking of). Were it poſſible for one of our fine gentlemen to enter into all the diſmal circumſtances of want, poverty and diſtreſs; and to conſider how far it might be in his power to remove them, he would be content, perhaps, to part with ſome of his preſent enjoyments, or rather to exchange them for thoſe of a more exquiſite nature. Methinks a man ready to periſh for hunger, has hardly ſo pleaſant a reliſh for his food, as he that gives it him. We ought heartily to pity the covetous, who do not know the pleaſure of being charitable."——But I forget myſelf, and the ſhort limits to which I am confined, while I diſcourſe on this divine ſubject.

Secondly, Charity is greater than Faith or Hope, as this is the end to which the other graces were deſigned to bring us. Faith and hope are important

¶ This diſcourſe was delivered at the quarterly charity-meeting in *Boſton*.

tant and neceſſary graces, but that which principally renders them of ſo great importance, is, that they tend to produce that divine love, that conformity to God, which is the perfection of human nature. Theſe eminent virtues would have been of far leſs uſe in a ſtate of innocence. After the apoſtacy of man the ſyſtem of religion was greatly changed and adapted to him as a fallen creature. Our views of God, if man had maintained his integrity, would have been much more direct than they are now, ſomething like what they will be in heaven. There would not have been that darkneſs in our minds, which makes a written revelation neceſſary; at leaſt there would have been no room for faith in a Mediator, which is ſo eſſential to the religion of a ſinner. The happineſs we ſhould have had a title to would have been preſent, ſeen, and felt, and therefore would not have been ſo much the object of hope. We ſhould not have had ſo great need of theſe graces to have brought us near to God, and to have excited in us that love and obedience which conſtitute ſo great a part of the happineſs of a reaſonable creature. We now need faith, not only to teach us that God is, but that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him, a truth for the knowledge of which we are indebted to revelation. We need hope to purify our ſouls, and to move us to thoſe returns of gratitude and obedience, which we ought to make to him, who hath not only done ſuch great things for us, but hath

promiſed more than we can now conceive of. If theſe graces bring us to a conformity to God, and to that divine temper which chriſtianity tends to inſpire, they anſwer the end, there is no farther occaſion for them. Theſe graces then are only means to a great and noble end. Neceſſary as the means are, the end is greater. All our duty to God and man are ſummed up in this one word Love; but faith and hope are neceſſary to enkindle the love of God in our ſouls, and to influence to fervent charity to one another. Faith and hope are the foundation, charity is the ſuperſtructure. They are of no worth, unleſs they operate by love; but where they are productive of this effect, as they always are when they are graces of the Spirit of God, they are of the greateſt importance. "You ſee then," as one juſtly obſerves, "how juſtly charity claims the pre-eminence above faith and hope. For it ſtands higheſt in the very order of nature, as far as the crown in the arched roof of the temple, is above the loweſt part of the foundation. Faith is inſtrumental, and hope farther ſubſervient to charity, but charity is perfective of faith and hope. Faith is the beginner, hope the promoter, charity the finiſher of virtue. It is the complement of all duty both to God and man; it is the end of the commandment;" it is the fulfilling of the law; it compleats the chriſtian. When love is perfect, the chriſtian is perfect. It is the ſum and end of all religion. It was the religion of paradiſe—It

was

was the religion of Abraham—It was the religion of Moſes—It is peculiarly the religion of Jeſus Chriſt—It is the religion of the ſaints on earth—and it will be the religion of juſt men made perfect.

This leads us to ſay,

Thirdly, Charity is greater than faith and hope, as this remains, when they in a great meaſure ceaſe or fail—This is generally ſuppoſed to be the meaning of the text; and the rather, becauſe it is ſaid a little before, "charity never faileth." It was obſerved in the laſt diſcourſe that there will be faith and hope even in heaven: But they will be very different from faith and hope as exerciſed on earth. Our preſent perſuaſion of a future ſtate of immortality is founded on our belief of the divine promiſe; the ſatisfaction we have in this perſuaſion ariſes from the pleaſing expectation of the good contained in the promiſe. But we are while here, very much unacquainted with the nature of heavenly happineſs; we are aſſured it will be exceeding great, but we cannot tell in what particular employments and enjoyments it will conſiſt. "We know not what we ſhall be."—— When we get to heaven, we ſhall have a clear preception of that happineſs which we can now ſcarce form any idea of; we ſhall partake of thoſe exalted pleaſures which are the object of our faith and hope. We ſhall enter into the joy of our Lord.

Lord. We ſhall ſtill believe and hope for the continuance of the good we enjoy. But the confidence the glorified ſaints have of this continuance will be little different from knowlege or certainty. What occaſion can they have of evidence, of any teſtimony to the truth of the promiſes, or any aſſurance of their entire and eternal accompliſhment, when they find theſe promiſes glorioufly fulfilling, and the life of heaven actually begun? When they no longer view heavenly objects, through, as it were, a dim mirror, but have an intuitive comprehenſive diſcernment of them? When there will be no tempter to vex their minds with ſuſpicions of their own ſincerity, nor any moral imperfection to weaken the evidences of their title to the divine favor.

Beſides faith and hope will in a great meaſure ceaſe as to their uſe. We greatly need theſe graces in the preſent ſtate of imperfection and ſin. We need faith to give us right notions of God and of his gracious purpoſes to the children of men —We need hope to carry us through the trials and difficulties of life—We need both to influence us to holy love, to purify our hearts, and to make us meet for heaven. But we ſhall have no need of the evidence of faith, when we know as we are known; there will be no occaſion for the comforts of hope, when there will be nothing to give us uneaſineſs; we ſhall not want arguments to prove that God is good, when we are actually admitted

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to a felicity, large as our deſires, and equal to our capacity of enjoying. We ſhall have no uſe for thoſe ſlow and imperfect methods of attaining knowlege and purity, which we ought to improve here, when we ſhall have ſuch clear and diſtinct views of God and divine truth, as will immediately transform our ſouls into an entire correſpondence. We ſhall not need the means when we have attained the end. We may therefore without impropriety ſay, that faith will be ſwallowed up in viſion, and hope in enjoyment. But then charity will be in perfection. This illuſtrious virtue will not only promote, but it will be one principal ingredient of our happineſs. We ſhall be able to contemplate on the great Firſt Cauſe without interruption from the cares and amuſements of this preſent evil world, or the impertinent ſuggeſtions of a buſy adverſary. We ſhall ſee his divine perfections in a glorious harmony; and ſhall behold his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs where we leaſt expected them. And tranſported with gratitude and holy joy, we ſhall join the glorious ſpirits around the throne in ſinging praiſes to God and the Lamb. Our love will be pure and intelligent; our gratitude ſincere; and our praiſes without interruption.

Even in the preſent ſtate, where our knowlege is ſo imperfect, when we contemplate the works of God with ſerioufneſs and attention, eſpecially when we look into the glorious ſcheme of man's redemption, we meet with ſuch diſcoveries of the divine

perfections

perfections as ſurprize and aſtoniſh us ; but how many new wonders will ariſe before the glorified mind ? We ſhall then have a more juſt ſenſe of our own unworthineſs, and a clear perception of the bleſſings which Chriſt hath purchaſed for us ; we ſhall be able, according to our meaſure, to comprehend, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of redeeming love, and ſhall know, in a higher ſenſe than we can now conceive of, the love of Chriſt, which infinitely ſurpaſſes the knowlege of the higheſt ſeraph. With the deepeſt humility, we ſhall proſtrate ourſelves before the throne of the all-perfect Jehovah, and caſt our crowns at his feet. With pleaſing admiration, we ſhall look on our once crucified but now exalted Lord, and think on his ſtupendous love, who, tho' he was rich, for our ſakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. We ſhall bleſs the " God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who hath bleſſed us with all ſpiritual bleſſings in heavenly places in Chriſt." We ſhall adore that grace, which hath triumphed over our unworthineſs, forgiven our iniquities, healed our moral diſorders, conducted us through the ſnares of this evil world, and brought us ſafe to eternal glory. Having much forgiven we ſhall love much. As the capacities of our ſouls will continually expand, our knowlege of God will increaſe, and we ſhall be transformed more and more into his image ; and the more we ſee of God, and partake of his goodneſs, the more elevated will be our expreſſions of admiration, of love, of joy and praiſe.

We ſhall rejoice with our brethren in glory. In heaven we ſhall feel no angry paſſions, no murmuring diſcontent, no ſecret envy; we ſhall be free from wrangling controverſies, and perverſe diſputings; the bleſſed inhabitants will be of one heart and of one mind; they will be united in one noble ſociety; they will mingle their converſation and their praiſe. They will congratulate one another, and, if need be, help one another. There will indeed be no occaſion of charity to relieve the neceſſitous, or to aſſiſt the diſtreſſed, in that bliſsful ſtate, whence all ſorrow is everlaſtingly baniſhed, and where God himſelf undertakes to ſupply every want from his own inexhauſtible riches. There will be no room to cover one another's faults, where none will think or do amiſs; or to exerciſe candor and tenderneſs to the ignorant and infirm, where all are arrived to a full maturity in knowlege and purity. "In one word, God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him: and where God dwelleth, all is love, and all is lovely, and therefore all will be happy for ever and ever."

What an affecting thought is it that the world is ſo much a ſtranger to this excellent ſpirit! that there is ſo little charity among the profeſſed diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt! But with what an ill grace ſhall we lament the want of love in others, if we are deſtitute of it ourſelves. It becomes us firſt to look to our own hearts, and to ſecure that divine principle which

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is of ſo great importance in the chriſtian life, and is ſo neceſſary to prepare us for that bleſſed world where perfect love and good-will reign forever. The love of God is the fountain of all other rational and religious affection. Where this is found, the mind is full of goodneſs, and will be ready to all acts of kindneſs and love. Let us pray, that God would grant us clearer views of his own divine excellencies, eſpecially as they are manifeſted in Chriſt, that beholding his glory, we may be changed into his likeneſs, and may imitate his great example by doing good to all. This divine love will make us like God; it will be an evidence that we are his children; it will be a ſpring of unſpeakable delight in this world; it will prepare us for heaven, as it will be a main part of our felicity there.

" Then conſtant Faith and holy Hope ſhall die,
" One loſt in certainty and one in joy:
" Whilſt Thou, more happy Pow'r, fair Charity,
" Triumphant Siſter, greateſt of the Three,
" Thy office, and thy nature ſtill the ſame,
" Laſting thy lamp, and unconſum'd thy flame,
" Shalt ſtill ſurvive———
" Shalt ſtand before the Hoſt of Heav'n confeſt,
" Forever bleſſing and forever bleſt."

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

CHRIST preaching to the Spirits in Priſon.

1 PETER III. 19, 20.

By which alſo he went and preached unto the ſpirits in priſon; which ſometimes were diſobedient, when once the long-ſuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight ſouls, were ſaved by water.

"THE goodneſs of God," ſays the apoſtle, "leadeth thee to repentance." This is the genuine tendency of the divine patience and forbearance; and this is ſometimes the happy effect: The hearts of ſinners touched by a gentle influence

from above, are affected with a ſenſe of their ingratitude, receive the impreſſions of religion, and are made willing and obedient.

This is not always the caſe. Sometimes, alas! men perverſly encourage themſelves in wickedneſs from that goodneſs of God which ought to have a directly contrary effect: Becauſe God delays to teſtify againſt their crimes, they raſhly preſume that to-morrow will be as this day, and their hearts are more fully ſet in them to do evil. This was the conduct of the inhabitants of the old world: They were diſobedient notwithſtanding the wiſe methods which God took to reclaim them: They abuſed his patience and long-ſuffering, till juſtice aſcended the throne, and doomed them to the moſt amazing deſtruction—"By which alſo he went and preached unto the ſpirits in priſon; which ſometimes were diſobedient, when once the long-ſuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is eight ſouls, were ſaved by water."—Various have been the interpretation of theſe words, which ſome have eſteemed one of the moſt difficult paſſages in the whole Bible.

What I propoſe is to ſhew—Whom we are to underſtand by "the ſpirits in priſon"—How Chriſt went by the Spirit and preached to them—Their inattention to the divine admonitions, and miſim-

provement

provement of the long-ſuffering of God—The aſtoniſhing cataſtrophe they hereby brought on themſelves—While the few who believed and repented were ſaved.——When I have thus led you to the true meaning of the words, I ſhall add thoſe practical reflections which naturally ariſe from the ſubject.

Firſt, I am to ſay who are intended by "the ſpirits in priſon."

Some of the ancient fathers ſuppoſed, that the apoſtle intended the ſouls of the ſaints confined in ſome part of Hades, as in a priſon, which they called Limbus Patrum; that the ſoul of our Saviour went, in the ſpace between his death and reſurrection, to this place, releaſed them from their confinement, and tranſlated them to heaven. § The church of *Rome* took advantage of this opinion to introduce their favorite doctrine of Purgatory, which hath greatly added to the revenues of the church, and given their prieſts an unreaſonable aſcendency over the conſciences of men.—The interpretation of our text, which gave occaſion to this abſurd doctrine, hath no foundation in ſcripture or reaſon, and yet there have been proteſtant writers, of conſiderable name in the learned world, who have embraced it.

§ See Dr. Benſon's Diſſertation on this text.

A learned divine ‖ of the laſt century imagined, "that the diſobedient ſouls mentioned in our text were in hell, not in the loweſt regions, but in the more tolerable parts thereof, that Chriſt in his ſpirit preached to them, and prepared them by the glad tidings of the goſpel, and after carried them to heaven in triumph, as a glorious ſpoil taken out of the jaws of the devil." But as Dr. Benſon juſtly obſerves, though "St. Peter hath mentioned our Lord's preaching to the ſpirits in priſon, yet he ſays not one word of his delivering any from thence, or of his tranſlating them to a ſtate of glory and happineſs."

Some have tho't this notion of Chriſt's preaching to the ſpirits in priſon, in the time between his death and reſurrection, countenanced by that article in the creed called the apoſtles' "He deſcended into hell." But this creed is falſly aſcribed to the apoſtles. It was not compoſed till long after their day.—This article of the deſcent into hell was not at firſt inſerted in it; and it is quite uncertain what was intended by the words at the time they were introduced, ſo that nothing can be argued from them, with reſpect to the meaning of our text. And ſeeing this paſſage in the creed, as it now ſtands, is quite dark and unintelligible, and rather leads ro erroneous ſentiments, than conveys any important truth, it had much better be wholly omitted,

‖ Dr. Henry More. See his works, page 18.

omitted, when we teach our children this ſummary of chriſtian faith. To go on,

Calvin, an interpreter one among a thouſand, taught, § that by the "ſpirits in priſon" the apoſtle intended the ſpirits of good men in a ſeparate ſtate. Theſe ſpirits, he ſuppoſes were happy before the coming of Chriſt, but a great acceſſion was then to be made to their happineſs. They therefore earneſtly looked for that great event and the promiſed ſalvation, as watchmen look out from a watch-tower. And according to their expectation, the grace of Chriſt was manifeſted to them, and they partook of the bleſſed influences of his Spirit.—This conſtruction of the words ſeems by no means natural and eaſy, and in order to ſupport it, we muſt conclude either that the apoſtle called thoſe diſobedient who were poſſeſſed of a principle of holineſs, or that in writing he put one caſe for another, contrary to all the rules of ſyntax; † neither of which is eaſily to be admitted.

The late Lord Barrington ſuppoſed, that the Logos had reſided in a viſible manner at the entrance of paradiſe, to guard the way to it—that when the world was to be deſtroyed, this Logos left the place of his reſidence and went into the ark —that

§ Vid. Calvin Comment. in Loc.

† Diſcrepat (fateor) ab hoc ſenſu græca ſyntaxis. Calvin.

—that "he preached to thoſe, whom God had ſhut up in it as a priſon and ſafe cuſtody; who had been diſobedient all the time that God waited with patience on the old world; which was while Noah was building the ark; but became obedient, after that the Logos, going into the ark, preached unto them." ¶ But to this it is replied, "It is not evident that Noah's family were diſobedient all the while that the ark was preparing—that they were converted in the ark—or that the Logos preached, or ſo much as reſided in the ark—Beſides, the ark is no where called a priſon, nor is it the uſual phraſeology of ſcripture to call living men by the name of ſpirits, whereas that word is often applied unto the dead."

Mr. Hallett ſays, "it ſeems pretty plain, that, before the coming of Chriſt, death was a ſtate of inſenſibility. But as our bleſſed Saviour carried the penitent thief into heaven with him, ſo he ſeems to have awakened the ſouls of all the good men that had died before him from the beginning of the world. In this ſenſe, ſays he, it ſeems neceſſary to underſtand what the apoſtle ſays, 1 Pet. 3. 19. By which ſpirit (or ſoul of Chriſt, when ſeparated from his body) he went and preached unto the ſpirits in priſon." ‡ But perhaps it is not ſo plain as this learned writer ſeems to think it was, that the old

¶ Lord Barrington's diſſertation on this text, at the end of his eſſay on the ſeveral diſpenſations of God to mankind.

‡ Mr. Hallett's note on Heb. 11. 40. in his continuation of Mr. Pierce's paraphraſe.

old teſtament ſaints ſlept till the coming of Chriſt, many paſſages of ſcripture look the other way ; and the Jews uſed to expreſs their belief of the happineſs of the righteous immediately after their death, by ſaying they were carried to Abraham's boſom. Our Saviour countenances this opinion when he ſays of Lazarus, that " he died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's boſom. * Our Lord's argument from God's ſaying of himſelf, " I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob," naturally leads us to conclude not only that there would be a glorious reſurrection of the ſaints, but that they did in the mean time exiſt and act in a ſeparate ſtate. " God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." † Beſides, who can imagine, that when Chriſt is ſaid to have preached to the ſpirits in priſon, it was intended that he went and preached to perſons in a ſtate of abſolute inſenſibility ? or that, by thoſe who were diſobedient in the days of Noah, we are to underſtand all the ſaints who had lived before the coming of Chriſt.

I ſhall only add the interpretation of the excellent archbiſhop Leighton. He ſuppoſes, that our text refers to " the miſſion of the Spirit, and preaching of the goſpel by it, after his reſurrection, preaching to ſinners and converting them according to the prophecy, which he firſt fulfilled in perſon, and

* Luke 16. 22. † Matthew 22. 32.

and after more amply in his apoſtles. That prophecy Iſaiah lx. 1. The Spirit upon him, and it was ſent from him on his apoſtles, to preach to ſpirits in priſon, to preach liberty to thoſe captives, captive ſpirits; and therefore called ſpirits in priſon, to illuſtrate the thing the more, by oppoſition to that Spirit of Chriſt, the Spirit of liberty, ſetting them free; and this to ſhow the greater efficacy of Chriſt's preaching than of Noah's, though he a ſignal preacher of righteouſneſs, yet only himſelf and his family, eight perſons ſaved by him, but multitudes of all nations by the Spirit and preaching of Chriſt in the goſpel." † This ſenſe of the words is very agreable to ſcripture language, and might eaſily be admitted, were it not that our Saviour's preaching to the ſpirits in priſon is expreſly limited to the days of Noah, and to the time when the ark was preparing; and therefore can by no rules of interpretation be underſtood of Chriſt's perſonal preaching after he had aſſumed a body, or of his preaching by his Spirit in the apoſtles.

Having given an account of the interpretations of this text, which we think ourſelves bound to reject, ¶ it remains that we endeavor to ſhow what is the

† Leighton's comment on 1 epiſtle Peter, vol. I. p. 91.

¶ Other ſolutions of this paſſage may be ſeen in Dr. Benſon's judicious diſſertation annexed to his paraphraſe on the firſt epiſtle of Peter.

the true meaning of the words; and they ſeem to be rendered difficult, more by the attempts that have been made to explain them, than by any obſcurity in the text itſelf.

The moſt general and obvious interpretation of this paſſage is, that "by ſpirits in priſon" the apoſtle means the ſpirits or ſouls of the wicked inhabitants of the earth, who lived before the flood, and who are now ſhut up in ſome part of Hades, as in a priſon; and are reſerved to the judgment of the great day. We obſerved before, that it is not uſual in ſcripture to call living men by the name of ſpirits, but this word is often uſed of thoſe who are in a ſtate of death. "The ſpirit ſhall return to God who gave it."‡ "The ſpirits of juſt men made perfect." ‖ It is not ſaid in our text, the ſpirits that *were* in priſon, as it is ſaid they *were* ſometimes diſobedient, but the ſpirits *in* priſon, now in priſon; who after their death were impriſoned, and ſtill remain in cuſtody. The words ſpeak their preſent condition in conſequence of their former diſobedience. It is not ſaid that Chriſt preached to them while in priſon, he preached to thoſe who are now in priſon, while they were upon earth, not in hell, purgatory, or any other place in the inviſible world. —The place where wicked men are confined after death is, with great propriety, called a priſon, as they

‡ Eccl. 12. 7. ‖ Heb. 12. 23.

they are held there in ſafe cuſtody, ſo that there is no eſcaping. 'Tis ſaid, § "When the thouſand years are expired, Satan ſhall be looſed out of priſon." The ſame Greek word is uſed as in the text—Of this priſon, this receptacle of ſeparate ſpirits, Chriſt hath the keys. "And hath the keys of Hades and of death." ‡

We are to enquire in the ſecond place—How Jeſus Chriſt "went and preached" to theſe ſpirits in priſon. There is no reaſon to ſuppoſe that our Lord preached to the antediluvian ſinners in perſon, or in a viſible appearance; on the contrary, the apoſtle, after having ſpoken of Chriſt, as "quickened by the Spirit," ſays, "by which alſo," i. e. the Spirit, "he went and preached to the ſpirits in priſon."—When it is ſaid he went, it doth not neceſſarily imply a removal from one place to another, the apoſtle ſeems to uſe this expreſſion in conformity to the phraſeology of the old teſtament, when God remarkably appeared in any work of his providence, eſpecially when he was pleaſed miraculouſly to interpoſe. Thus it is ſaid, "the Lord came down to ſee the city."—"And the Lord ſaid—"let us go down."‖—"I am come down to deliver them." ¶ So Chriſt went and preached in the days of Noah, he gave the antediluvian ſinners the plain-

eſt

§ Rev. 20. 17. ‡ Rev. 1. 18.

‖ Gen. 5. 7. ¶ Exod. 3. 8.

eſt and cleareſt warning by that holy patriarch, it was as if he had himſelf come to declare their danger to them. The apoſtle Paul uſes the ſame kind of language, when he ſays of our Saviour, he "came and preached peace to you which were afar off." † He came by his apoſtles, as in our text he went by Noah, who had the influence of that Spirit which dwelt in Chriſt without meaſure.

By a number of paſſages in the old teſtament, it ſeems as if the kingdom of grace was, even from the eſtabliſhment of it after the apoſtacy of man, under the direction of the Logos, who was "in the form of God," and thought it not robbery to appear in the character of God—of the infinite Jehovah; as he afterwards "took upon him the form of a ſervant" and was "found in faſhion as a man;" He was the LORD—Jehovah, who ſometimes condeſcended to make a viſible appearance to the patriarchs—He was the Angel of the covenant, who preſided in every diſpenſation of the kingdom of God, who ſent his prophets and meſſengers from time to time to bear teſtimony to the truth of religion, to inſtruct and reform mankind. He inſpired Noah, who is called in St. Peter's ſecond epiſtle "a preacher of righteouſneſs," ‡ moſt probably, becauſe he was ſent to warn the antediluvians of the approaching cataſtrophe, to exhort them to repentance and the practice of righteouſneſs. It is no

† Epheſians 2. 17. ‡ 2 Peter 2. 5.

no very diſtant conſtruction, to ſay Chriſt did what he ſent his ſervant Noah to do, whom he inſpired and aſſiſted in his preaching. And what can be more natural than to ſuppoſe, that while the holy patriarch was, by the direction of heaven, preparing the ark for the ſecurity of himſelf and family, he frequently teſtified againſt the impiety, diſſoluteneſs and vice of the men of that generation, and warned them to flee the wrath that was to come? This is what his own benevolent mind would naturally prompt him to, and we might reaſonably expect that he would be imployed on this errand by the God of heaven, as this is perfectly analogous to his uſual method of dealing with ſinful men. He warns them of their danger, before he executes his vengeance upon them; and calls them to repent, before he overwhelms them with deſtruction.

Thirdly, We are told the inattention of theſe ſinners to the divine admonitions, and their miſimprovement of the long ſuffering of God. That infinite Being, who is not willing that any of his creatures ſhould periſh, but had rather they would turn and live, did not deal with the antediluvian ſinners as he juſtly might have done. They had corrupted their way, and were guilty of the groſſeſt enormities; but he was kind and gracious to them, and uſed means to reclaim them from their vicious practices. The Spirit of God ſtrove with them;

Noah

Noah preached to them: But they would not be reclaimed, they turned a deaf ear to the kind warnings of heaven, and continued in their diſobedience, this afforded an opportunity for the exerciſe of the patience and "long-ſuffering of God which waited in the days of Noah." It is an awful account which is given of the moral ſtate of the antediluvian world in the ſixth chapter of Geneſis, "The earth was corrupt before God; and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God ſaid unto Noah, the end of all fleſh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them: and behold, I will deſtroy them with the earth." But even when they had arrived at this height of wickedneſs, and ſeemed quite ripe for deſtruction, God forbore to puniſh them, "And the Lord ſaid, "my Spirit ſhall not always ſtrive with man, for that he alſo is fleſh, yet his days ſhall be an hundred and twenty years." The Chaldee paraphraſe has it, "A term ſhall be given them of one hundred and twenty years, if they will convert." ¶ So long God would defer the judgment with which he had threatned them. So long he would give them a ſpace for repentance, by which their ruin might be prevented. In all this time Chriſt preached to them by his Spirit, under whoſe inſpiration, Noah faithfully ſet before them their ſin and the

¶ Vid. Ainſworth's Ann.

the danger they were in of the righteous judgment of God.

Fourthly, We are to take notice of the amazing cataſtrophe theſe ſinners brought upon themſelves. God waited long on the old world, but the time of his patience was limited, at the end of one hundred and twenty years the flood came and ſwept them all away. "In the ſecond month, the ſeventh day of the month, the ſame day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered, and all fleſh died that moved upon the earth.—And they were deſtroyed from the earth. And Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark." * God gave them a ſpace to repent, and they repented not; and at length ſudden deſtruction came upon them. It was ſudden though it had been ſo long predicted, becauſe they deſpiſed the warning, and gave no attention to the admonitions of that faithful preacher of righteouſneſs whom God ſent unto them. They went on in their buſineſs, their diverſions, and their ſins, till they found themſelves actually involved in the ruin they had made light of. "They did eat, they drank, they married wives,

* Geneſis 7. 11. &c.

wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark ; and the flood came and deſtroyed them all." † Happy for them, had this been the whole. Alas ! this amazing judgment put an end to their time of probation, it did not put an end to their exiſtence. Like the evil ſpirits whom they had reſembled in their impiety, they were reſerved in chains unto the judgment of the great day. Our text ſpeaks of them as " ſpirits in priſon," *now* in priſon, it affords no glimmering of light, no reaſon to expect that the priſon doors will be opened, till they are opened to bring them before the tribunal of their judge.

Fifthly, Our text leads us to obſerve, the ſalvation of Noah and his family in this general devaſtation. " Wherein few, that is, eight ſouls, were ſaved by water." Out of the water—in or amidſt the water—by water—by the means of the water—were carried ſafely through the water—or were ſaved during the time of the deluge by water, thus variouſly are the words rendered by critics. Whatever is the exact tranſlation of the original words in this place, the plain meaning is, that theſe eight perſons were preſerved, when the reſt of the world were deſtroyed in the deluge. However others deſpiſed the prediction of the judgment whichGod would bring on an ungodly world,

Noah

† Luke 17. 27.

Noah believed the divine threatning, and repaired with his family to the ark, which by the direction of heaven he had prepared, and by this wise conduct saved himself and his house. "Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark." ‡ "By faith," says, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, § "Noah being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." This temporal salvation was an emblem and a type of that eternal life to which by the grace and mercy of God he became entitled, for while by his faith and obedience he "condemned the world," he "became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith." The like figure whereunto, even baptism doth now save us," as in the words following our text, "not the washing away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God." As the ark was the means of preserving Noah and his family, so baptism, if accompanied with inward holiness, or the answer of a good conscience, will save christians from eternal ruin through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Having endeavored to illustrate the words of our text, I am now to lead you to some practical reflections.

And in the first place, Behold the goodness and forbearance of God! He "saw that the wickedness

‡ Genesis 7. 27. § Hebrews 11. 7.

wickedneſs of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." So that it is ſaid, " it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." The words are exceeding ſtrong, and emphatical, and were deſigned to expreſs God's infinite diſpleaſure at their flagrant and enormous guilt; which was ſuch, that he determined to cut them off from the face of the earth ; and yet he forbore to puniſh them, he ſeemed loth to give them up, and to enter on his work, his ſtrange work ; and bring to paſs his act, his ſtrange act. He defer'd it that they might have opportunity to repent, and ſo prevent the threatned evil.

You have in this inſtance a ſtriking diſplay of the goodneſs of God,and a ſpecimen of his method of dealing with ſinners. The whole courſe of his moral government ſhows that he loveth righteouſneſs and hateth all the workers of iniquity. The perfection of his nature diſpoſes him to teſtify againſt a thing ſo vile and deteſtable as ſin is ; his rectoral holineſs obliges him to puniſh it. But juſtice doth not immediately ſeize the offenders. God bears with their perverſeneſs and ingratitude, and even waits to be gracious. To this his patience and long-ſuffering it is owing, that we are any of us on this ſide the grave, that we are out of everlaſting burnings : To this it is owing that you ſtill have

the advantages of the goſpel, that you enjoy the means of grace, are favored with the ſtrivings of the Spirit, and, after all your provocations, are invited to the happineſs of the goſpel. God's infinite abhorrence of ſin ſerves to illuſtrate his goodneſs in bearing with the ſinner, he bears with thoſe who continually affront and diſhonor him, he bears with them and continues their exiſtence, when with infinite eaſe he could puniſh—he could deſtroy them. This is not after the manner of men. Their patience is ſoon exhauſted; they know not how to put up affronts, or to bear injuries, eſpecially from thoſe whom they have obliged by acts of kindneſs and love. But God always acts like himſelf, like a Being of boundleſs goodneſs and grace. "My thoughts, are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, ſaith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." ‖ Eſpecially his thoughts of goodneſs are unutterably—infinitely ſuperior. How ought ſuch amazing benevolence, ſuch vaſt obligations to affect our ſouls, and to melt them into penitence, love and obedience! How baſe! how ungrateful is it, to make no other return to our kind benefactor, than rebellion and diſobedience! And yet is not this too much the temper, and the practice of mankind? The goodneſs of God doth not lead men to repentance.—On the contrary, by contemplating

‖ Iſaiah 55. 8, 9.

templating his love, his grace, and forbearance we are naturally led to reflect,

In the ſecond place, on the obduracy and ingratitude of human nature. Though God waited on the old world all the while the ark was preparing, and Noah reaſoned with them of righteouſneſs and the judgment that was coming upon the world; yet how few were wrought upon! only the preacher's own family; none others repented; none others fled to the ark for ſafety. We are ready to wonder at their ſtupidity, and to condemn their unbelief and impenitence. But how nearly do we reſemble them! We have continual admonitions, not of a flood of water, not of any general temporal judgment approaching, though we are not ſecure from public or private calamities; but we are told, that the Lord is at hand, that death is nigh, even at the door, and that after death is the judgment. At the ſame time, we are pointed to an ark of ſafety, Chriſt Jeſus is preached in our ſtreets, we are invited to partake of the bleſſings of his kingdom, through this man are preached to us repentance and remiſſion of ſins. How few attend to theſe calls! Do not the moſt put far away the evil day, and encourage themſelves in their impenitence, becauſe judgment is delayed? Do not ſome preſume on the divine goodneſs, and harden their minds againſt the warnings they have in the word and providence of God becauſe he is patient and long-ſuffering? "Becauſe

cauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil."

Forbear then to cry out of the antediluvian ſinners; turn all your reſentment againſt yourſelves, condemn your own ingratitude, your own obduracy, your own impiety. What ſhould you think of one of your fellow-men who ſhould conduct towards you, as you conduct towards the bleſſed God? Should you not think, you ought to deſpiſe, reject and puniſh him?—It is not poſſible, that one of your fellow-creatures ſhould treat you with ſuch baſe ingratitude as you diſcover to this greateſt and beſt of beings; becauſe you have never been able to confer ſuch vaſt obligations. How ought you then to abhor yourſelves, and to repent in duſt and aſhes! How readily! how heartily ſhould you return to him through Jeſus Chriſt! Notwithſtanding all your provocations, he is not willing that you ſhould periſh, he is ſtill ready to receive you into the arms of his mercy, to beſtow eternal life and happineſs upon you. How unreaſonable! how ungrateful! to miſimprove this his goodneſs to a purpoſe directly contrary to it's genuine tendency, and his gracious deſign! to continue in ſin becauſe his grace abounds! Nor is ſuch a conduct more criminal than it is dangerous. God is merciful and gracious, but he is alſo holy and righteous: he bears long, but he will not bear always: His Spirit ſtrives with man, but this Spirit

may

may be reſiſted, he may be grieved, he may depart ſo as never to return. God may ſay with reſpect to you, as he ſaid when provoked by the ſinners of the old world, "my Spirit ſhall not always ſtrive with man." They had their day of grace, they did not improve it, and the moſt awful deſtruction came upon them.

Which leads us to remind you,

In the third place, of the power, the juſtice and ſeverity of God. What a dreadful day was it when the flood came, when "the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened," and the rain poured down in cataracts forty days and forty nights, and the world was involved in one general ruin! Parents with their children, huſbands and their wives, brethren and their ſiſters! Thoſe who had been companions in wickedneſs were now companions in diſtreſs! Think—you heard one calling to another for help, but none able to help himſelf in this ſcene of miſery. Imagine them climbing the higheſt rocks, and aſcending the loftieſt mountain for ſafety; but ſoon finding the loftieſt ſummits, and the talleſt mountains covered with the waters, which continually increaſed, till all was deſtroyed! and while they could find no hope of relief, beholding the ark conducted ſafely by an almighty inviſible Pilot, through this univerſal devaſtation. Now they ſaw the wiſdom of righteous Noah, who had repaired to the only

only place of ſecurity—They reflected on their impious ſcoffs at that holy man, and their contempt of his warnings—They view him ſecure under the divine protection, but find themſelves devoted to inevitable perdition—ſinking into death—into eternity. What a dreadful picture is here!—Whoſe hearts doth not recoil!—Who doth not tremble at the ſight when it riſes up in his imagination!

But remember, that the world is reſerved for a yet more awful deſtruction, as we are taught by St. Peter, 2d Epiſtle, iii. 5, &c. "By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth ſtanding out of the water, and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with waters periſhed. But the heaven, and the earth which are now, by the ſame word are kept in ſtore, reſerved unto fire againſt the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men." You now live at eaſe, you are laying ſchemes for futurity.—Your Lord delayeth his coming, he bears with your impiety and folly; "he is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance." This is his deſign, this is the tendency of his goodneſs.—You perverſly abuſe his patience, and encourage yourſelves in a life of diſſipation and vice. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, the earth alſo and the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up."

Image

Image to your minds the aſtoniſhing ſcene which is here deſcribed. Can you conceive any thing more tremendous? When we ſee the heavens in a blaze, when the arrows of the almighty are darted around us, and the peals of thunder ſound loudly in our ears—When the earth ſhakes under our feet, and we fear leſt it ſhould open and ſwallow us up, or leſt our dwellings ſhould fall and bury us in their ruins, we have ſome idea of the majeſty and power of God. But theſe are only faint emblems of the amazing terrors of that day, when all nature will diſſolve, and the fire of an angry God will be enkindled on the earth!—What is the moſt near and penetrating lightning to a world in flames, and all conſuming in one general conflagration!—What is the moſt violent ſhock of an earthquake, which cauſes our habitations to reel and totter, or perhaps lays waſte a town, a city, or country, to the cruſh of a world, and the entire overthrow of all the works of nature and of art!—When we think of this dreadful cataſtrophe, inadequate as our conceptions are, well may our fleſh tremble for fear of God, and we be afraid of his judgments!

"There is in general," ſays Dr. Burnet, "a great analogy between the two deluges, that of water, and that which will be of fire. At the flood, the windows of heaven were opened above, and the abyſs was opened below; and the waters of theſe two joined together to overflow the world: In like manner,

manner, at the conflagration, God will rain down fire from heaven, as he did once upon Sodom; and at the ſame time the ſubterraneous ſtore-houſes of fire will be broken open; which anſwers to the diſruption of the abyſs: and theſe two meeting and mingling together, will involve all the heaven and earth in flames.—Where are now," he adds, "the great empires of the world, and their great imperial cities? Their pillars, trophies, and monuments of glory? Shew me where they ſtood, read the inſcription, tell me the victor's name. What remains, what impreſſions, what difference or diſtinction do you ſee in this maſs of fire? But it is not cities only, and works of men's hands, but the everlaſting hills, the mountains and rocks of the earth, are melted as wax before the ſun; and their place is no where found. Here ſtood the *Alps*, a prodigious range of ſtone, the load of the earth, that covered many countries, and reached their arms from the ocean to the *Black Sea*; this huge maſs of ſtone is ſoftened and diſſolved, as a tender cloud, into rain. Here ſtood the African mountains, and *Atlas* with his top above the clouds. There was frozen *Cancaſus*, and *Taurus*, and *Imaus* and the mountains of *Aſia*. And yonder towards the north, ſtood the *Riphæan* hills, clothed in ice and ſnow. All theſe are vaniſhed, dropped away as the ſnow upon their heads, and ſwallowed up in a red ſea of fire. "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; juſt and true are thy ways, thou King of ſaints." † In the midſt of this general devaſtation, they will behold the Lord in the air,

† Burnet's Theory, vol. 2.

air, coming to take vengeance on a guilty world, not by depriving ſinners of their exiſtence, but by dooming them to hell, to dwell in everlaſting burnings. This ſecond death will be the principal object of their fear. Gladly would they be conſumed in the general burning—Gladly would they hear a ſentence of annihilation—But to appear before their Judge—Before a Judge, whom many of them have deſpiſed and rejected—A Judge, who comes to execute the threatnings of his word, and to overwhelm them with irreſiſtible deſtruction—What terror and diſtraction will ſeize their guilty breaſts !—They will be ready in their aſtoniſhment and deſpair, to ſay to " the rocks and the mountains, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb : For the the great day of his wrath is come ; and who ſhall be able to ſtand ?" But ah ! where will be the rocks to fall on you ? or the mountains to cover you, when all will be melted with fervent heat ?—You muſt appear before an omniſcient Judge, and at his tribunal give an account of the things done in the body. You muſt hear a black catalogue of your ſins, every one of which will be as a dart ſtriking through the liver—a ſword piercing to the heart. Yes, thoſe ſins you are not now aſhamed to commit, which, perhaps, you pride yourſelves in, will give you the moſt uneaſy reflections, when you find that for them you are bro't into judgment. Your guilt will ſtrike you dumb, you will wiſh, but wiſhes will be in vain, that you could recall the unhappy

moments of your paſt life—that you might have another ſpace for repentance.

But, miſerable ſinner, doſt thou, like the ſcoffers ſpoken of by St. Peter, make a mock at religion, and ridicule the expectation of Chriſt's coming to judgment? or doſt thou ſay in thine heart, "my Lord delayeth his coming;" and on this preſumption indulge to ſenſuality and wickedneſs? Hear the warning which our Lord hath given; "the Lord of that ſervant ſhall come in a day that he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and ſhall cut him aſunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites, there will be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth." Several paſſages ſpeak of the coming of Chriſt to judgment as a thing ſudden and unexpected, and which will ſurprize the ſinner in his ſecurity, his mirth, and his wickedneſs. Our Lord tells us, "as it was in the days of Noah, ſo ſhall it be alſo in the day of the Son of man, they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and deſtroyed them all. Likewiſe alſo as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they ſold, they planted, they builded, but the ſame day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimſtone from heaven and deſtroyed them all, even thus ſhall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." But be this as it may, the ſovereign Lord of life may ſay, "thou fool, this night thy ſoul

ſhall

ſhall be required of thee." And death will be the end of the world with you. If it find you unprepared, it will put an end to all your hopes and endeavors; your ſouls will be kept in priſon, in ſafe cuſtody, like the ſpirits of the antediluvians, to the judgment of the great day. Then they will be looſed, not to renew their crimes, but to receive the puniſhment of them—to receive their final ſentence, and to enter upon their everlaſting doom. It will aggravate their miſery to behold the righteous ſecure under the divine protection, and happy in the ſmiles of their Judge. They will ſee the dead in Chriſt ariſen, and with thoſe ſaints that ſhall be alive at his coming, caught up to meet the Lord in the air; where, at a diſtance, they will behold the deſolation brought on the earth, and with humble gratitude give glory to him that hath loved them and waſhed them in his blood. This amazing diſtinction will give them the moſt pungent ſenſe of their own folly; while they will be obliged to own the wiſdom of thoſe who have in time provided for eternity. Which leads me

In the laſt place, To contemplate the ſafety of thoſe who believe and obey the meſſages of God. At the ſame time that God executed his vengeance on the impenitent world, he diſcovered his paternal care of thoſe who believed his threatnings, and put themſelves under his protection. They were ſaved and reſerved to repleniſh the earth. So thoſe who are admitted into the true church, not only by

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an external waſhing, but by the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt, will be finally ſaved by Chriſt. Not only eight ſouls, but an innumerable multitude, which no man can number, will be found among the triumphs of divine grace, and will, by their grateful acclamations, add to the magnificence of that glorious day; which will be the day of their redemption from the grave—the day of the gladneſs of their hearts—the day of their entrance into the joy of their Lord.—Bleſſed be the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt who hath provided for our ſalvation from ſin and death, as he did of old for the preſervation of Noah, by commanding him to prepare an ark. Noah would have loſt the ſecurity which God deſigned for him, if he had diſbelieved God, and had not entered into the ark. So if you neglect Jeſus Chriſt, if you continue in unbelief and impenitence, you will miſs the ſalvation of the goſpel. You will ſoon leave this world, it is of infinite importance, that when you become ſeparate ſpirits, you may not join the ſpirits in priſon, but may be admitted into the ſociety of the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, and be forever happy with the Lord. It is an important admonition with which St. Peter concludes his diſcourſe on the ſecond coming of Chriſt, "ſeeing then that all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved, what manner of perſons ought ye to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs, looking for and haſtening unto the coming of the day of God."

SERMON

SERMON IX.

Redemption by the Blood of CHRIST.

REVELATION V. 9.

Thou waſt ſlain and haſt redeemed us to God by thy blood.

IF you deſire to ſee a perfect character, read the hiſtory of our bleſſed Saviour. You behold in this illuſtrious perſonage an aſſemblage of virtues, without the leaſt fault or blemiſh. Image to yourſelf any thing that is lovely, any thing that is excellent, you find it in him. If any one excellency ſhine with diſtinguiſhed luſtre, it is love. It was goodneſs, pure diſintereſted goodneſs that brought him into the world—he exhibited the moſt amiable benevolence during the whole time of his continu-

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ance on earth—he gave the higheſt proof of love in the cloſing ſcenes of life. All the ſufferings he underwent were for us. Our ſins were the cauſe, our benefit was the end, of all he endured. The love of Chriſt is the admiration of angels : How ought it to affect us, who are ſo deeply intereſted in it ! With what ſacred gratitude ſhould we remember, that he was ſlain to redeem us by his blood !

Our text is part of a ſong, which the ſaints and angels above are repreſented as ſinging in heaven, in honor of our bleſſed Redeemer. St. John ſaw in viſion a ſealed book in the right hand of him that ſat upon the throne. When no other perſon was found " worthy to open the book," our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, under the repreſentation of " a Lamb that had been ſlain for ſacrifice, approached the throne, and took the book out of the right hand of him that ſat on the throne." And when he had received the book, the heavenly church proſtrated themſelves before him ; " and they ſung a new ſong, ſaying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the ſeals thereof ; for thou waſt ſlain, and haſt redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ; and haſt made us unto our God kings and prieſts ; and we ſhall reign on the earth."

We are to diſcourſe at this time upon that clauſe only, " Thou waſt ſlain, and haſt redeemed us to God by thy blood." It is proper,

Firſt,

First, To inquire what we are to underſtand by redemption. And then,

Secondly, To ſhow how we are redeemed by the blood of Chriſt.

First, We are to inquire what we are to underſtand by redemption.

This word, in it's original ſenſe, intends the paying down a valuable conſideration for the recovery of ſomething which was once our's, but is now in the poſſeſſion of another. We buy it again—we purchaſe it a ſecond time. If it is freely given to us, there is no redemption; but if we lay down an equivalent, we redeem it. The ſcriptures do not always uſe the term in this ſtrict and proper ſenſe. It is often transferred from it's original meaning to a ſenſe which contains only a part of it; or rather, it is applied to things which come under the ſame general notion, though they do not agree in every particular. It is uſed, where the perſon or thing was never their's who are ſaid to redeem it, but they only lay down a price to purchaſe it of another. A ſlave is ſaid to be ranſomed, when a ſum is paid for his deliverance from bondage. And by an eaſy tranſition the word came to ſignify deliverance in general, where there is no price at all paid, but it is a mere act of power. "The angel," ſays dying Jacob, "which redeemed me from all evil." Agreably, God ſaith to his people Iſrael, "I will bring

bring you out from under the burthen of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a ſtretched out arm." It follows from the various ſenſes in which we are ſaid to be redeemed in ſcripture, as well as from the different words which are uſed in the original texts, to expreſs Chriſt's purchaſe, that nothing can certainly be determined by theſe particular terms, except that he hath wrought ſome great deliverance for us. But if we cannot determine, from it's being ſaid that Chriſt bought and redeemed his church, that there was a price paid for it's redemption; moſt certainly, we cannot determine that there was not. And however we might be at ſome uncertainty, if it was only ſaid in general that we are redeemed by Chriſt, yet it is very ſtrange reaſoning, becauſe redemption is ſometimes uſed in a large ſenſe for deliverance from any kind of ſlavery, ſubjection, or diſtreſs, without any mention of a price or equivalent; that therefore it muſt be ſo underſtood, when a price is particularly mentioned; which is the caſe with reſpect to our redemption by Chriſt. We are not only ſaid to be bought, but to be "bought with a price;" * what this price is we are told, † "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, ſuch as ſilver and gold, but with the precious blood of Chriſt, as of a lamb without blemiſh and without ſpot." And "the Son of man is ſaid to give his life a ranſom for many." ‡

Whatever

* 1 Cor. 6. 20. † 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19. ‡ Mat. 20. 28.

Whatever makes it conſiſtent with the perfections of God, and the honor of his government, to pardon and ſave man, may be fitly ſtiled the price of our redemption—This price may be conſidered as paid to God, as it was what he demanded and accepted, and was pleaſed to make the ground or reaſon of his forgiving our ſins and admitting us into favor. On account of this, God conſiders us as if we had not ſinned; or rather, he accepts of what Chriſt hath done and ſuffered as an equivalent for our ſuffering, ſo far as to put us into a capacity of eſcaping future puniſhment. Nor is this all that Chriſt hath purchaſed for us. In this reſpect "where ſin abounded, grace did much more abound." We are not only by the mediation of Chriſt delivered from condemnation, but are accepted in the beloved, we have peace with God, and have the promiſe of eternal life and happineſs. All the bleſſings which Chriſt hath purchaſed, or which God hath promiſed through him, are included in the ſcripture notion of redemption. But we are not to ſuppoſe, that theſe bleſſings are actually beſtowed on all the children of men. The goſpel makes it evident they are not. "The ſpecial way, terms, and conditions," ſays Dr. Owen, "whereby and whereon ſinners may be intereſted in this ſatisfaction made by Chriſt, are determined by the will of God, and declared by the ſcripture." Jeſus Chriſt hath made the ſalvation of men a poſſible thing, but they only are actually ſaved, who ſubmit to Chriſt, and are

to a conformity to the nature and will of God; theſe have an intereſt in the promiſes, and become heirs of eternal life. The price of their redemption was paid by Jeſus Chriſt; they are made partakers of it when they become believers: But their redemption is not compleat till the reſurrection, when they who ſleep in their graves will be awakened, and be admitted to glory, honor, and immortality. Therefore the reſurrection is called "the day of redemption," ¶ and "the redemption of the body." † In that glorious day it will be ſeen how great bleſſedneſs Chriſt hath purchaſed for his people, he will own and applaud their piety, faith and obedience, and reward them with joy, and everlaſting honor—Joy that is now unutterable—glory which cannot be conceived in this preſent imperfect ſtate.

Secondly, I am to ſhow, how we are redeemed by the blood of Chriſt; or how this blood becomes the ground or price of our redemption. In order to give you ſome juſt idea of this important truth; I obſerve,

Firſt, That man had by ſin expoſed himſelf to puniſhment. Every creature is under law to the Creator. The leaſt breach of this law makes him a ſinner; I need not add that man is a ſinner, "there is not a juſt man upon earth that doeth good and ſinneth not." Who is not conſcious of a heart prone to ſin, and of innumerable tranſgreſſions

¶ Eph. 4. 30. † Rom. 8. 23.

tranſgreſſions of God's holy law? As ſoon as we form ideas of God at all, we conceive of him as a holy Being. He hath an infinite love of order and harmony, of every thing which tends to promote univerſal good. He hath an infinite ſatisfaction in that which he himſelf does, becauſe it is right and fit, agreable to his nature and character; and he is pleaſed with every thing in his creatures, which reſembles his own infinite rectitude. Sin directly contradicts the nature and will of God; it mars the beauty of the creation, it tends to introduce diſorder and confuſion: The bleſſed God muſt therefore be infinitely offended with it. In proportion to the degree of his diſpleaſure, he muſt be diſpoſed to make his offending creatures feel the effects of it. But every ſuch diſpoſition in God is under the direction of infinite wiſdom. He hath the moſt wiſe and good ends in all he does. He is never diſpleaſed without the higheſt reaſon, and he expreſſes his diſpleaſure becauſe it is fit and right that he ſhould. It is an injurious reflection on the divine character, to ſuppoſe that he inflicts evil on any of his creatures, for the ſake of gratifying any angry paſſions, or furious reſentment. This is to make him a man like ourſelves. He doth not puniſh any for puniſhment-ſake, nor is it likely he would have ſuffered any of his creatures to have ſinned, if he had not known how to have bro't good out of evil, as he hath done, with reſpect to man, by the mediation of Chriſt. If puniſhment is not likely to anſwer ſome

valuable

valuable end, we cannot ſuppoſe God will puniſh. The mere miſery of his creatures, however they may deſerve it, cannot yield any ſatisfaction to this infinitely benevolent Being.

We are to conſider the glorious Jehovah as the all-wiſe Governor of the world; who hath given his creatures a rule of conduct, a law which is holy, juſt, and good. This ſovereign Lord ſets on an exalted throne, from whence he hath an intire view of univerſal nature, and orders all things ſo as to accompliſh the wiſe deſigns of his own infinite mind. From hence he obſerves his ſubjects in their various ſituations, he ſurveys their moral conduct; and to what their actions tend; whether they reverence adore and obey him as they ought, or whether they renounce his authority and rebel againſt his government. When they ſin againſt him, he is to be conſidered not merely "as an offended perſon, but as an offended ruler." In this character, it ſeems neceſſary, it becomes his divine perfections, to teſtify againſt the violations of his law, and to manifeſt his rectoral holineſs. It is right and fit in itſelf, it is ſuitable to the honor and majeſty of the ſupreme Governor, it would be unbecoming his dignity to act otherwiſe. "The puniſhment of ſin is not a matter of arbitrary appointment, but of reaſon, equity and juſtice." "The ſame reaſon that there is, why honor and obedience ſhould be at all paid to the laws of God; the ſame reaſon there is,

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that this honor ſhould be vindicated, after it hath been diminiſhed and infringed by ſin. To imagine, that God requires obedience to his commandments, and yet that he will not ſupport their authority, againſt the contempt and diſobedience of men; to ſuppoſe that God has conſtituted juſt and righteous laws to be obeyed by his creatures, and yet that he will not maintain that conſtitution, by vindicating the honor of thoſe laws whenſoever it ſhall be inſulted by any wilful tranſgreſſion; is contrary to the wiſdom, and altogether inconſiſtent with the government of God, and with the nature of government in general." If God ſhould ſhow no regard to the honor of his law, nor give any teſtimony of his diſpleaſure againſt moral evil, would men have a due reverence and reſpect for the divine commandments? or could they poſſibly think diſobedience to them was ſo very diſpleaſing to him as it had been repreſented? Would not this embolden them in ſin? And might it not encourage others to tranſgreſs? Of how great weight this laſt conſideration may be, it is impoſſible for us to ſay. God doubtleſs has other creatures under his government beſides men; and who can determine what reference the different parts of his ſyſtem have to each other; or how his conduct to an apoſtate world may affect, or influence other parts of his dominion? It is plain from ſcripture, that we have ſome connection with angels both good and bad; and perhaps, there is ſome general ſcheme carrying on in innumerable

numerable worlds, to the completion of which man is deſigned to contribute. An indiſcriminate beſtowment of favors would evidently ſap the foundation of moral government, or rather it would prove that there was none at all; and 'tis difficult to ſay, what would be the conſequence of ſuch a general relaxation of the reins of government in a world of free intelligencies; tho' it is eaſy to conceive it might introduce great diſorder and confuſion. Probably, every created intelligence is formed with the paſſions of hope and fear; and that the evil which will be the conſequence of it, is one of the motives which God makes uſe of to keep moral agents from ſin. 'Tis certain, God hath in every revelation he hath made of his will to mankind, threatned death and deſtruction to thoſe who break his law, or violate that conſtitution he hath placed them under. Now the ſame reaſon which made it neceſſary to threaten theſe evils, ſhows the expediency at leaſt, if not the neceſſity, of inflicting them upon the offenders, unleſs ſome other way could be found out, which would equally ſecure the honor of the divine government. Juſtice took place on the angels which fell, who are "reſerved in chains under darkneſs, to the judgment of the great day." And man, when he had fallen from God, had no reaſon to expect the interpoſition of mercy. He had ſinned—Sin expoſed him to death—This was the threatning which God had made a ſanction of his law—and this was the ſentence pronounced. God would have been clear from any charge of injuſtice,

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if he had inflicted this puniſhment, or any other which he hath at any time threatned. If it had exceeded the demerit of the offence, a Being of infinite rectitude could not have threatned it. And if it did not exceed, there was the utmoſt reaſon to think God would inflict it. Certainly there was nothing to neceſſitate him to remit a puniſhment which he might juſtly inflict. God could not be obliged to ſet aſide his original conſtitution, and to accept of ſatisfaction from another: Or if there had been any ſuch obligation; where was the perſon capable of making this ſatisfaction; or of doing any thing which might be conſidered as a good reaſon for his paſſing by the ſin of man—any thing which would make this conſiſtent with the ends of government; or exhibit the divine Being in his true character, as righteous Governor, at the ſame time that he pardoned the ſinner? And if this could not be done, what ground of hope could ſinful man have? what proſpect of mercy? or of any thing but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh? This was the ſituation into which man was brought by ſin—a ſtate of guilt, and expoſed to death.

Secondly, In this ſtate of wretchedneſs, there was a diſpoſition in the divine Being to ſhew mercy, to deliver and ſave ſinful man. This diſpoſition is manifeſt from that which hath taken place. The cauſe appears by the effect. That God was determined to ſave man is evident from his ſending his

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Son on this important errand; and he could be moved to this only by goodneſs. If man had come up to the demands of the original conſtitution, he would have done no more than his duty, he would have had no merit, the continuance of his life would have been an act of goodneſs. Surely then he could not deſerve any favor in his ſinful apoſtate ſtate. The divine goodneſs, or mercy, is the ſource of all thoſe bleſſings, which are deſigned and provided for man in the plan of redemption. His own infinite benevolence was the only motive—there could be no other. The plan of man's redemption was laid before he had an exiſtence: The purpoſe of grace was declared without any ſollicitation on the part of the offender: The firſt covenant or original conſtitution abſolutely condemned the tranſgreſſor: It made no proviſion of a ſurety: It contained no promiſe to the penitent: It gave no encouragement to repent: It offered no aſſiſtance to the returning ſinner. The ſending a Mediator, his obedience, his ſufferings, his death, all the hopes man now has, all the promiſes that are made thro' Chriſt, have their foundation in a new conſtitution or ſecond covenant. That ſentence was not immediately executed upon fallen man; that God hath provided a Saviour; that he is willing to be reconciled to the children of men through Jeſus Chriſt, is wholly owing to himſelf: He hath appointed this method of conveying bleſſings to man who had offended him.

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We do not expreſs ourſelves with accuracy, however good the meaning may be, when we ſay the death of Chriſt renders God propitious to to us. It is by means of the obedience and death of Chriſt that God acts propitiouſly towards us: He makes them the ground or reaſon of his communicating good to us ſinners; but he was propitious before; he had kind diſpoſitions or intentions; he was inclined to make up the breach, or there had been no Mediator between God and man —Chriſt had not died. This conſtitution hath it's foundation in the goodneſs of God. This is the language of ſcripture—"God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life." The ſending a Saviour was not the cauſe, but the effect of divine love. It was an evidence that God did not delight in the death of ſinners, that he was not willing that any ſhould periſh, and that he had the moſt kind and gracious deſigns to the children of men. I go on to obſerve,

Thirdly, The wiſe method God hath taken to ſhew mercy to man, and at the ſame time ſhew his infinite diſpleaſure at ſin. To inflict the puniſhment threatned would leave no room for mercy. To pardon the offender without any regard to the demands of the law would ſeem to be an encouragement to diſobedience. In this ſtate God was pleaſed to take a way of reconciling the world to

himſelf, infinitely becoming him as Governor of the world, becoming his goodneſs, his rectitude, his wiſdom. This was by appointing one to ſuffer in the room and ſtead of the ſinner. The more innocent this ſubſtitute was, the more near and dear to God, the better would the ends of government be anſwered: The more would God's hatred to ſin, his good-will to ſinners, and his high regard to his ſovereign authority, be ſhewn by appointing him to this office. For this end therefore God conſtituted his Son to be a Prince and a Saviour—to be a propitiation for the ſins of the world. Here

Firſt, It is impoſſible there ſhould be a perſon of more perfect innocence. He was a partaker of the divine nature, in ſuch a ſenſe as no creature ever was, or can be; therefore he is denominated the only begotten Son of God. When he became a man, a moſt extraordinary method was taken, that he might be free from the moral imperfections which are become natural to human nature. He was conceived of a virgin by the immediate power of the Holy Ghoſt; on which account he is called "that holy thing." And his whole life was anſwerable to ſo extraordinary a beginning; he was "holy, harmleſs, undefiled, ſeparate from ſinners." He not only did nothing amiſs, but he always did the things that pleaſed the Father. "Such an High-Prieſt became us, who needeth not daily," as thoſe high-prieſts who were appointed by Moſes, "to of-

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fer up ſacrifice firſt for his own ſins, and then for the people's." If Chriſt had been a ſinner, he would have needed a ſacrifice of expiation for his own ſins, and therefore his ſacrifice could be of no avail to us. But having no ſin of his own, and voluntarily offering himſelf for ſuch important ends, as the illuſtration of the divine perfections, and the procuring the greateſt good to man, what he did might well be transferred to us, or made a reaſon for God's remitting our ſins, and beſtowing the greateſt bleſſings upon us. Eſpecially if we conſider,

Secondly, The dignity of his perſon. He is called the Son of God, he is ſo in a higher ſenſe than is any man or angel. "To which of the angels ſaid he at any time, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" He was not only "with God," but he "was God." We read, that he was "in the form of God," and that he "tho't it not robbery to be equal with God." and it is mentioned as an extraordinary inſtance of love, that God "ſpared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all." The ſubſtituting ſuch a great and glorious perſon, as the Son of God, to die for us, or in order to our deliverance from death, anſwered all the ends which would have been anſwered by our death. The ſufferings of Chriſt clearly diſcovered God's abhorrence of ſin, and his diſpoſition to teſtify againſt it. The inflicting ſuch great evils on ſo glorious a perſon, and in ſuch a cauſe, ſet the

rectitude

rectitude of the divine government in a more conſpicuous light, than would even the puniſhment of the offender himſelf. If man had ſuffered the penalty of the law he had violated, juſtice 'tis true would have had it's courſe, and the conſequence had been terrible enough. But it would not have appeared that goodneſs at all interpoſed, or that there had been any diſpoſition to relieve and ſave us. But as the caſe now ſtands, God appears on a throne of grace, willing to ſhew mercy to ſinful man, and yet ſuch is his regard for the honor of his government, that he would not paſs by the ſin of man, till one of the moſt exalted dignity had laid down his life a ſacrifice. Such weak unknowing creatures as we are, could not poſſibly have conceived, how the juſtice and the goodneſs of God could both have their demands; how the ſinner could be ſaved, and God appear at the ſame time the righteous Governor of the world. But the wiſdom of God found out this admirable expedient which reconciled all; that the Son of God ſhould aſſume our nature, ſuffer and die for us; that God ſhould accept his ſufferings; and on account of them releaſe us from puniſhment. None but a Governor who had the higheſt regard to his law, and was unalterably determined to aſſert and vindicate his ſovereign authority, would have taken ſuch a method, or have inſiſted on ſuch an atonement. If goodneſs hath prevailed, it hath not prevailed againſt juſtice. God is juſt, he appears

juſt,

juſt, when he paſſes by the ſin of man, receives him into favor, and beſtows upon him eternal life and happineſs. "Whom," as the apoſtle argues, "God hath ſet forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteouſneſs for the remiſſion of ſins that are paſt, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I ſay, at this time his righteouſneſs: that he might be juſt, and the juſtifier of him which believeth in Jeſus." How could there be a more full demonſtration of the righteouſneſs of God, than his ſending his Son to be a propitiation, to endure the moſt aſtoniſhing ſufferings, before he would receive man into favor? How could the Law be more highly honored, than it is by God's taking this extraordinary method to teſtify againſt the violation of it, when he ſaw fit to pardon the offender? Who can take encouragement from the forbearance and mercy of God to ſin againſt him? Who muſt not ſee the danger of diſobedience? And how perfectly doth the mediation of Chriſt ſecure the honor of the divine government, in the pardon and ſalvation of men?

This ſubject hath been often happily illuſtrated by the ſtory of Zaleucus prince of the Locrians. Zaleucus made a law, that adulterers ſhould loſe both their eyes; it fell out, that his own ſon, the heir of his crown, was convicted of this crime, the people, who greatly reſpected him for his amiable qualities, came and interceded for him. Zaleucus,

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in a conflict between zeal for juſtice, and affection for his ſon, took but one eye from him, and parted with one of his own, to anſwer the demands of the law. Now I enquire, did not this conduct of Zaleucus diſcover even a ſtronger regard to juſtice, than if he had puniſhed his ſon according to the law? Did it not as effectually ſecure the honor of his government? and equally tend to deter others from tranſgreſſing? You obſerve I bring this ſtory as an illuſtration of the ſubject, and not as an exact parallell to the ſufferings of our Saviour in our room and ſtead. It ſhows that there may be a wiſe compoſition of mercy and juſtice in dealing with an offender, or that a law-giver may demonſtrate his righteouſneſs, and ſhow a tender regard to his law, when he doth not preciſely inflict the penalty on the tranſgreſſor.

I ſhall conclude at preſent with ſome practical reflections.

Firſt, We are led to a moſt humiliating view of human nature. Man hath revolted from God, and is in a ſtate of rebellion. There is a native proneneſs in all that deſcend from apoſtate Adam to ſin. It is ſhocking to think, to what a degree of wickedneſs human nature would proceed, if left wholly without reſtraint. And though a great part of mankind are, by the force of reaſon and natural conſcience, by education, by circumſtances in providence, and the influence of divine grace, in ſome meaſure

measure preserved from such extremity of vice; yet, every one, who is capable of moral action, is guilty of moral evil. Every one is more or less sensible, of an opposition to that pure virtue to which the gospel calls us; and, that he hath been led away and enticed by the allurements and temptations of a vain world. In many things we offend all, and come short of the glory of God. How melancholy a situation is this! When we look into ourselves, when we reflect on our past lives, what a lesson of humiliation may we learn! When we look into another world, what a scene of terror presents itself to our minds! We behold a God of unspotted purity, of inflexible justice, of irresistible power—A God, who is the righteous Governor of the world, and who hath made the most awful declarations against those who disobey and affront him. Can we know that we are in this number, and not tremble for fear of God? and not with the deepest sollicitude make that enquiry, What shall we do to be saved? Blessed be God, this is an enquiry we may make in hope. There is a possibility of our deliverance from that wretched state to which we are reduced by sin. We, who are too justly stiled enemies to the blessed God, may be reconciled by the blood of Christ.

Secondly, How should the wisdom and grace discovered in the scheme of man's redemption fill our hearts with admiration and praise! Man had fallen,

fallen, and ſeemed loſt for ever. The heavenly hoſts were waiting to hear our condemnation, and the attendant ſpirits ſtood ready to execute the vengeance of an offended Deity. They knew well that God could not contradict himſelf, or diſhonor his own perfections; they ſaw no way in which he could act like a wiſe Governor, ſecure the honor of his government, and paſs by the tranſgreſſion of his law; and pronounced our deliverance impoſſible. But the God of heaven pronounced otherwiſe! I have found a ranſom—one who is able to ſave—and one who can ſave without the leaſt infringement on the rights of juſtice—who can deliver from the curſe of the law, and at the ſame time magnify the law and make it honorable—My own Son is the Saviour!—He ſhall be incarnate—He ſhall be made under the law—ſhall obey it's precepts—ſhall ſuffer and die a ſacrifice for ſin—thus ſhall he redeem them by his blood—ſhall deliver the rebels from guilt and from puniſhment—ſhall reinſtate them in my favor—and procure for them an admiſſion into theſe manſions of reſt and happineſs. Heaven ſtood amazed at the wiſdom and grace of this wonderful plan!—The heavenly arches reſounded with their anthems of praiſe—and the bleſſed inhabitants ſang a new ſong, "Glory to God in the higheſt, becauſe there is peace and good-will towards men." And ever ſince, the angels have been prying into the myſteries of redeeming love, and while they contemplate, they diſcern

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new marks of wiſdom—new matter for admiration, joy, and praiſe. Let us unite with them, in admiring and adoring this aſtoniſhing diſplay of the divine perfections. If the angels above, rejoiced at the news of a Saviour provided for man, who could only have a more diſtant concern in this event; ſhall not we, the children of men, rejoice and be exceeding glad, for whoſe immediate benefit this Saviour was provided—who are by the mediation of Chriſt reſcued from the loweſt miſery, and raiſed to the hope of a bleſſed immortality! Great was the infelicity which ſin had brought upon man: Great is the ſalvation which Chriſt hath purchaſed for him. A diſpenſation this, which we ought to review with the cloſeſt attention, and to improve with the greateſt diligence.

We ſee the glory of God in the works of creation, and of providence; but He hath given the brighteſt view of himſelf in the work of redemption. Here we ſee unſpotted purity, perfect rectitude, and boundleſs goodneſs, reconciled and glorified. What exalted ideas ought we to entertain of the infinite wiſdom of that Being, who could thus bring good out of evil, and derive glory even from that, which, in itſelf, is moſt diſpleaſing and diſhonorable to him!

Let us give glory to him, who hath loved a ſinful world, and ſent his only begotten Son upon a

deſign ſo full of grace and benevolence.—Let us be thankful and bleſs his name, that the word of ſalvation is ſent to us, and that we hear offers of peace and reconciliation.—Notwithſtanding all Chriſt hath done, we cannot be ſaved—we cannot partake of that bleſſedneſs which is promiſed through him, unleſs we believe the truths, and practiſe the precepts of the goſpel.—We are guilty of the baſeſt ingratitude, and expoſe ourſelves to the moſt aggravated puniſhment, if we do not hearken to the reaſonable propoſals made to us.—Let us immediately accept of Chriſt and the bleſſings which he offers.—We may expect to find much oppoſition from our corrupt hearts, many objections will naturally ariſe in our minds, againſt the way of ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt. But we ought carefully to ſuppreſs all oppoſition, and to ſilence every objection. The goſpel will always furniſh us with arguments every way ſufficient.—The more we contemplate it, the more ſurprizing manifeſtations of divine wiſdom and goodneſs will open to us.—Angels, who excel in wiſdom, could ſee enough to excite their praiſe. It is becauſe we have not the knowledge and purity of angels, if we do not join with them in their joyful aſcriptions to him who ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

SERMON

SERMON X.

The Connection between the Duties and Comforts of Religion.

ACTS IX. 31.

----------Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt.

IN this chapter we have an account of Saul's ſudden and miraculous converſion. The verſe which contains the text mentions the happy effect of this ſurprizing event. "Then had the churches reſt throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified." They were confirmed in the truth; and by a wiſe improvement of their outward peace and liberty, they made progreſs in holineſs and

and in comfort; by which means the church was greatly increaſed. "Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt, were multiplied." Others, obſerving their holy walk, and that bleſſed peace and ſerenity which they enjoyed, were induced to embrace chriſtianity; reaſonably concluding that to be the beſt religion, which influenced it's votaries to lead ſuch holy and unblameable lives, and which afforded them ſuch obſervable comfort and ſatisfaction of mind.

It is propoſed, at this time, to conſider thoſe two clauſes which were firſt recited, not as they are related to the context, but as they ſtand connected with each other. It is not without deſign, that the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt are thus placed together by the ſacred writer. It plainly teaches us, how theſe chriſtians attained to that peace of mind which is here aſcribed to them, and which had ſuch happy influence on thoſe who beheld them. They firſt walked in the fear of the Lord, and then in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt. And this is the way, in which only, chriſtians in all ages are to expect the comforts of religion. Agreably, we ſhall endeavor,

Firſt, To illuſtrate the phraſes here uſed; which will naturally lead us in the

Second place, To obſerve the connection there is between the duties and comforts of religion.

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The firſt thing propoſed, is, to illuſtrate the phraſes uſed in the text. "Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt."

Firſt, We are to ſay what it is to walk in the fear of the Lord.

Fear, in it's original meaning, is a paſſion of the mind, ariſing from an apprehenſion of evil. Agreably, the fear of the Lord, in ſcripture, ſometimes ſignifies the uneaſineſs which a ſinner feels, who is conſcious that he hath offended God, and is apprehenſive of the puniſhment which God hath threatned. But the phraſe is not always to be taken in ſo harſh a ſenſe. There is a fear of God which is conſiſtent with the higheſt love, and which they may exerciſe, who do not conſider God as an angry Judge, but as reconciled to them through Jeſus Chriſt, and ſuſtaining the character of a kind Friend and tender Father. Their fear is ſtill exerciſed about ſin, but they are not ſo much affected with the penal conſequences annexed to it by a holy and juſt God, as with it's own evil nature; they conſider it as wrong in itſelf, and an act of ingratitude to that Being, who is ever conſulting the happineſs of his creatures. They fear to diſpleaſe him, becauſe they love him, and deſire an intereſt in his love. This fear proceeds from a belief of his perfections—a perſuaſion of his right to govern thoſe to whom he hath given being, and a capacity of acting—

a ſenſe of the great things he hath done for them, and the hope that he will do more. Such a fear as this would keep men from the commiſſion of ſin, even tho' God had annexed no puniſhment to it.

By the fear of the Lord in ſcripture, we are often to underſtand, not only the principle, but the effect which it has on our hearts and lives. Where there is ſuch a holy reverential fear of God, it naturally tends to univerſal holineſs and obedience. Therefore the fear of the Lord is frequently put for the whole of religion, both principle and practice. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom, and to depart from evil is underſtanding." † The fear of the Lord is here explained by departing from evil, which is the character of the truly good man. In like manner, the pſalmiſt ſays, "Come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord." ‡ I will teach you, how you may ſerve God and be happy with him. By the fear of the Lord in our text, we are then to underſtand the whole of religion and virtue.

Walking, in ſcripture language, denotes the general courſe of our lives. When this term is connected with our moral conduct, it ſignifies a habit or courſe of action. Thus the kings of Iſrael are ſaid to walk in the ways of Jeroboam, that is, they lived in the commiſſion of thoſe ſins which he introduced.

† Job 28. 28. ‡ Pſa. 34. 11.

troduced. We read alſo, of walking in the ſtatutes of the Lord, by which is intended a courſe of life agreable to them. So, when it is ſaid in our text of the churches of Chriſt, that they walked in the fear of the Lord after Saul's converſion, it intends that they were under the influence of religion; that they lived in ſome degree anſwerably to their chriſtian character and profeſſion, practiſing every duty which Chriſt their Lord required of them.

This it is to walk in the fear of the Lord. They who come up to this character have an habitual ſenſe of the being and attributes of God; they conſider themſelves as ever in his preſence and under his inſpection, and endeavor in their whole converſation to pleaſe and glorify him. They view the perfections of God as they are manifeſted by Jeſus Chriſt, and carefully attend to thoſe diſcoveries they have of the glorious God in the goſpel, in which there are the kindeſt offers of aſſiſtance, the ſtrongeſt aſſurance of acceptance, and the higheſt incentives to obedience. The fear of the Lord is a powerful principle of action in their ſouls, it moves them to all acts of piety and devotion, and to regard every intimation of his will; it leads them to an entire ſubmiſſion to Jeſus Chriſt, to whoſe character and miſſion God hath borne the fulleſt teſtimony; it excites them to do juſtly in all their dealings with mankind; to ſhew mercy to thoſe who need their help; and to walk humbly before God

God and man. Senſible, that they often do amiſs, and always come ſhort of their duty, they are frequent in their acts of faith and repentance. They rely on the merits of Chriſt for pardon, and on his Spirit to enable them to correct what hath been amiſs. They labor to grow in grace, and aim at the higheſt degrees of virtue and holineſs. In fine, They who fear the Lord look to the end of things, they believe a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, they think of the account they muſt give up to their Judge: They humbly hope he will approve their inward piety and the uprightneſs of their hearts, and contemplate with joy and gratitude on the glory which will then be revealed; but, at the ſame time, they expect none of the great and good things promiſed, on account of their own works of righteouſneſs, but look for the mercy of God through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

Secondly, We are to enquire what it is to walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt.

The ways of religion are ſaid in ſcripture to be "ways of pleaſantneſs and all her paths peace." The chriſtian life is repreſented as a life of quiet, of comfort, of joy. "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing ſhall offend them." Our Lord promiſes, "Come unto me, and I will give you reſt." We read in one place of "the peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding," in another

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of " rejoicing with joy unſpeakable and full of glory." It is a direction given to the Philippians, " Rejoice evermore." One would think from ſuch expreſſions, that chriſtians were to be free from all trouble; that they were to meet with no darkneſs or perplexity, but to enjoy uninterrupted peace and reſt; that they would have ſome degree of the bleſſedneſs, as well as the diſpoſition of heaven, while they continued upon earth. Whereas it is far otherwiſe. We often ſee chriſtians in trouble like other men; not only exerciſed with the ſorrows and afflictions of life, which they can well enough bear if they have inward comforts. But they complain that God hideth himſelf from them; they have no tokens of his love; they have diſtreſſing fears and doubts about the ſtate of their own minds, and can derive no comfort from the great and precious promiſes of the goſpel. This is a moſt certain fact, which greatly perplexes weak and tender minds; and gives occaſion to perſons of libertine principles to reproach religion, as if it deſtroyed all peace, inſtead of affording that delight and ſatisfaction which we are taught to expect. Where, ſay they, is the bleſſedneſs ye ſpake of? or what profit ſhall we have if we be cleanſed from our ſin?

But they labour under a great miſtake, who think that the darkneſs & perplexity, which good chriſtians are exerciſed with, is the genuine effect of religion. Poſſibly, men, whoſe lives are only one continued

feries of diſſipation and pleaſure, or who are overwhelmed with the cares and hurries of the world, may not be diſturbed with ſuch doubts and fears. It is not likely, that they who do not meditate on God at all, will have any concern to obtain his favor; or, that they who never think of futurity will be afraid of future evils. An attention to the truths of religion, a belief of the perfections of God, a ſenſe of the worth of our ſouls and the danger of their being loſt forever, a conſciouſneſs of the weakneſs and treachery of our hearts, a high eſtimation of ſpiritual bleſſings, and a fear of a miſtake in a matter of ſuch importance, may be the occaſi- of great uneaſineſs to our minds.

But it doth not follow from hence, that religion tends to deprive us of any rational ſolid ſatisfaction, of any peace which we ought to deſire. That eaſe which ungodly men ſeem to enjoy, proceeds from an inattention and ſtupidity which are quite unbecoming creatures capable of thought and reflection: And however they affect to appear, it is ſeldom that any are ſo hardened in vice, as not to have, at times, an awful ſenſe of the being and perfections of God, and a dread of that account they muſt give to him of their conduct in life.—That horror and diſtreſs, which chriſtians ſometimes feel, may proceed from a natural fearfulneſs and diffidence—from a diſtempered body—from ignorance of the doctrines and truths of religion—from miſtaken notions

notions about their own integrity—or from the ſuggeſtions of a buſy adverſary. But in all theſe caſes, their diſquietude is not to be attributed to religion, it is directly contrary to the goſpel of Chriſt; a ſkilful guide would by no means encourage ſuch a dark and gloomy temper, but would ſet himſelf to reaſon them out of apprehenſions ſo diſhonorable to God, and injurious to their own ſouls. There is no religion in being melancholy and hopeleſs, or in yielding to the temptations of him who is ever ſeeking to ruin and deſtroy us. Perturbation or dejection is no duty, though it may be occaſioned by that which is right and fit, a conſcious ſenſe of guilt.

But though a conviction of our ſinfulneſs and guilt may juſtly diſreſt our minds, and excite fear and anxiety; yet certainly, the religion of Chriſt affords conſideration ſufficient to quiet and compoſe us: And it is becauſe it doth not operate in us as it ought, that it ever fails of this effect. Perfect love caſteth out fear; and it is becauſe our knowledge and grace are ſo imperfect; that our fears are ſo prevalent. Whatever exceptions we may make in favour of melancholy tempted perſons; the general reaſon, that religion doth not afford chriſtians more peace and ſatisfaction is, becauſe they have ſo little religion, ſo little of the ſpirit of chriſtianity in the courſe of their lives. In the goſpel of Chriſt there is a happy foundation for peace and reſt, but by ſome miſtake or neglect of their's they miſs of it.

It is not eaſy to conceive, how there could have been a ſcheme more wiſely adapted to afford relief and eaſe to the mind of man, than we have in the religion of Jeſus.—Have we offended God, violated his law, and expoſed ourſelves to his diſpleaſure? The goſpel aſſures us that the King of heaven is a merciful King; that God may be juſt and yet juſtify the ungodly; and that there is no condemnation to them which are in Chriſt Jeſus, who walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit.—Are we weak and ſinful, and quite inſufficient to comply with the kind and reaſonable requirements of the goſpel? We have a fountain of grace ſet open, to which we may apply with freedom, and from which we may derive conſtant ſupplies; "I can do all things," ſays the holy and humble apoſtle, "through Chriſt which ſtrengthneth me".—If thro' grace we are enabled to believe in Chriſt, to repent of our ſins, and to obey the goſpel, the moſt great and precious promiſes are made to us—promiſes of bleſſings moſt valuable and important in their nature, and eternal in their duration. Nothing can be greater, nothing can be better, than the things which God hath provided for ſinners, and which are propoſed to them, as objects of their faith and diligent purſuit, in the goſpel of Chriſt—The favor and love of God—a conformity to him in holineſs—an aſſurance of every thing good and deſirable in this world, and of a bleſſed ſtate of immortality in another. What can the chriſtian deſire more? what can he have more? A believer in Chriſt hath

a univerſal grant of every thing neceſſary to his happineſs. "All things are your's,"‖ ſays the apoſtle, all things are deſigned and ordered for your advantage. Well therefore may the chriſtian rejoice even with joy unſpeakable and full of glory.

Shall not he rejoice, who, though conſcious of innumerable faults and follies which juſtly expoſed him to the vengeance of an almighty Deity, hath reaſon to think that his ſins are forgiven, that his tranſgreſſion is covered, that God will remember no more what he hath done amiſs, and that his ſins will never riſe up in judgment to condemn him? —Shall not he rejoice, who was once in a ſtate of ſpiritual death, and under the government of his luſts and paſſions, but now finds a bleſſed change in himſelf, that he has a ſupreme regard to God, a love of virtue, and a deſire to do that which is right and fit, that he hath ſome little reſemblance of the Deity, which is the true perfection of man, and lays a foundation for his higheſt happineſs?—May not he rejoice, who was once a child of wrath, becauſe a child of diſobedience, but is now adopted into the family of God, ſuſtains the relation of a ſon to the Lord of heaven and of earth, and of conſequence is an heir of all thoſe good things which God hath prepared for them that love him?—May not he rejoice who can look upon the eternal Jehovah as his Friend, his Father, and his Portion; who is allowed to conſider every diſpenſation

‖ 1 Cor. 3. 2.

of

of divine providence, as ordered in covenant love ; who knows that even the afflictions of this preſent life ſhall work for his good, and are ſent to make him wiſer and better ?—Hath not that man a reaſonable foundation of joy, who is aſſured of ſupport in every trial, of aſſiſtance in every difficulty, of protection in every danger, and of relief in every diſtreſs ?—May not he rejoice, who, though he knows that he muſt ſubmit to the king of terrors, can look upon death as diſarmed of his ſting, not as an enemy, but as a friend, a friend ſent to put an end to his trials and conflicts, and to place him beyond the reach of ſorrow and of trouble ?—Shall not he rejoice, who can look forward to the glorious morn of the reſurrection, when this mortal ſhall put on immortality, and this corruptible ſhall put on incorruption, and death ſhall be ſwallowed up in victory ?—In fine, ſhall not he rejoice, who can look on heaven as his home, as his certain inheritance ; who can view the reſt which remains for the people of God, as deſigned for him ; who can think with holy confidence, of being free, not merely from the trials and difficulties of life, but from his own faults and follies, from every remainder of moral evil ; who is aſſured that he ſhall be admitted to the beatific viſion and enjoyment of God, in whoſe favor is life, and whoſe loving kindneſs is better than life ? This is part of that bleſſedneſs which God hath provided for them that love him ; but how little a portion is heard of it ? And ſhall not

not one, who is heir of ſo great bleſſedneſs, have his heart dilated with joy and gratitude?—If a condemned malefactor ſhould not rejoice at the news of a pardon—If one ſeized with a dangerous illneſs ſhould be calm at hearing of a certain cure—We ſhould all be aſtoniſhed at their inſenſibility, (and yet there may be good reaſons why either of theſe ſhould not be pleaſed with ſuch an event). Should we not have greater reaſon to wonder, if one, who, of an enemy, is made a friend of God; if one, who, of an heir of hell, is made an heir of heaven, ſhould feel no pleaſing emotion—ſhould be inſenſible of his happineſs? The men of the world rejoice, when earthly good things are increaſed, they take pleaſure in the vain and empty enjoyments of this life; how much more reaſon hath he for comfort and ſatisfaction, who is a partaker of ſpiritual bleſſings, and is poſſeſſed of durable riches and righteouſneſs! Well may the chriſtian, with the pious pſalmiſt, deſpiſe and in a ſenſe renounce every other object, and triumph in God, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I deſire beſides thee. My fleſh and my heart faileth, but God is the ſtrength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Nor are we obliged only to ſay, that the chriſtian hath reaſon to rejoice. Bleſſed be God, there have been thoſe who have been able thus to rejoice in God their Saviour. If we look into the hiſtory of the

the acts of the apoſtles, we there ſee the influence of religion, and to what a noble height it is capable of raiſing the mind of man. With what chearfulneſs did they part with their eſtates, and lay the money at the apoſtle's feet ! With what patience did they bear the ſpoiling of their goods, and the torture of their bodies ! They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to ſuffer ſhame for the ſake of Chriſt, and in the cauſe of truth. They preached the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, with freedom and intrepidity, in places of the greateſt politeneſs, and in the midſt of ridicule, perſecution, and danger. They were ſcourged; they were mocked; they were bound; they were impriſoned; they were deſtitute; they were afflicted; they were tormented; they were treated like the off-ſcouring of the earth; but none of theſe things moved them, neither counted they their lives dear, ſo they might finiſh their courſe with joy. Religion carried them above all; they could look down with contempt on the frowns and flatteries of the world; and triumph even in the agonies of death. Knowing that God was their friend, they little minded who was their enemy. They remembered that this world was not their home, and were very willing to leave it. They had a profpect of a bleſſed ſtate of perfection after this life, and earneſtly deſired an admiſſion into it. They had inward peace in the midſt of outward trials; and anticipated the joys of heaven by the comforts they enjoyed on earth.

Nor

Nor was this happy effect of chriſtianity peculiar to the firſt age of the church. Indeed it is likely, God doth in times of perſecution afford ſome uncommon diſcoveries of himſelf, and ſome ſpecial prelibation of the joys of a future ſtate, to prepare the minds of good men for extraordinary ſufferings, and to animate them to perſevere in the cauſe of true religion. It may reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that this was the caſe when chriſtianity made it's firſt entrance into the world, and the profeſſors of it met with ſo many obſtacles and ſo great temptations. But, God be praiſed, religion has had it's comforts at all times; and there have been found thoſe in every age of the church, who have been enabled to live above the world while they have lived in it; and have gone thro' the moſt trying ſcenes with patience, reſignation, and joy. There are chriſtians, even in theſe days, who can on good grounds call God their Father, and look upon themſelves under his gracious covenant care; who can think of death with comfort and ſerenity; and reſign their ſouls into the hands of the Redeemer, with a full perſuaſion that he is able to keep that which they commit unto him againſt that day.—— You are not to think, my brethren, that they who freely ſpeak of the comforts of religion are the only ones who enjoy them. Many, having other ſentiments of what is right and proper, are very cautious how they declare the ſecret tranſactions of their ſouls, who yet do not come at all behind the others, either in the degree of their goodneſs, or in

the peace which flows from it ; and would, if they tho't they were called of God to do it, publicly bear their teſtimony to the truth of religion from what they have felt of it's influence. We, who are frequently called to viſit ſick and dying beds, with pleaſure find many who have long before this important period devoted themſelves to God ; and can appeal to the great Searcher of hearts that they have ſincerely deſired to ſerve him. Tho' conſcious of innumerable faults imperfections and ſins, they can, with ſome degree of holy confidence, commit themſelves into the hands of him who hath loved them and given himſelf for them ; and are able, in the near view of eternity, to teſtify, that religion yields a peace which the world cannot give or take away—a peace, which they have long enjoyed, tho' the enjoyment was never known, except to God and their own ſouls. But whether the inſtances of thoſe who have experienced the comforts of religion are many or few, is not ſo much to our preſent purpoſe—If there are any, it proves that religion is capable of yielding peace and ſatisfaction to the mind of man—that it affords conſiderations which are a reaſonable foundation of comfort—and that it is poſſible to attain this great bleſſing. If this is the caſe, the defect is not in religion, but in themſelves, when chriſtians are deſtitute of it—it is owing to ſome neglect or fault of their own.——In what ſenſe this is the *comfort of the Holy Ghoſt* we ſhall endeavor to ſhow in the next diſcourſe.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

The Connection between the Duties and Comforts of Religion.

ACTS IX. 31.

——Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt.

THE point now before us is to ſhow, in what ſenſe that peace of mind which religion tends to inſpire is denominated the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt. By this expreſſion we are to underſtand that this glorious and divine Perſon is, one way or another, the Author of that peace which chriſtians enjoy. And it is aſcribed to him from theſe ſeveral conſiderations—As the Spirit of God hath in the word exhibited the marks of grace, and taught us what are the proper grounds of religious comfort and peace—As the Spirit produces that holy

temper

temper and ſtrengthens to that right conduct, which the ſcripture makes the mark or evidence of a good ſtate towards God—And, as He, by enlarging, ſtrengthening, and enlightning our minds, enables us to diſcern thoſe gracious fruits and effects which he hath produced in us.

Firſt, The comforts of religion are aſcribed to the Holy Ghoſt, as this Divine Perſon hath in the word taught us what are the proper grounds of religious comfort and peace.—The chriſtian's joy is not an accidental emotion of the paſſions; a mere mechanical elevation of mind; or a ſudden kind of eaſe which a perſon feels he cannot tell why, nor for what reaſon. It is a ſober rational thing, and may be defended upon all the principles of reaſon and religion. It ariſes from an inward perſuaſion that we are in a ſtate of favor with God, and have a title to all the bleſſings of the new covenant. Now in order to determine that this is our happy ſtate, it is neceſſary we ſhould know upon what terms we may obtain acceptance with God, and be admitted into his favor. We cannot know this without an expreſs declaration; becauſe no gracious diſpoſition, no act of obedience, nor any courſe of holy living, can of themſelves give us a title to the favor of God, and to that immortal ſtate of happineſs which the goſpel reveals and offers. This title is conferred only by the promiſes of the new-covenant. Neither faith, repentance, nor any other duty or

virtue

virtue is meritorious of the divine favor, they are conditions of ſalvation, only as God is pleaſed to connect ſalvation with them. God who was not obliged to ſave us at all, was at liberty to make his own terms in ſaving us. There is indeed a ſuitableneſs and fitneſs in thoſe virtues and graces which God hath made the condition of our ſalvation; but that ſo great happineſs is connected with them is owing to the appointment of God, and the conſtitution of the covenant of grace. Had man repented, believed, and performed all other acts of duty which the goſpel requires, yet had there been no promiſe annexed to them, God had been under no obligation to beſtow eternal life and happineſs upon him. Since therefore all the influence, which any grace or duty hath in our ſalvation, is derived from the declaration and promiſe of God; we muſt look into that revelation which contains theſe promiſes and declarations, to know whether we have an intereſt in them or not. If we find that we have thoſe graces wrought in us, which the ſcripture makes the marks of God's elect, or that we perform thoſe duties which are preſcribed in the word, and in the manner which is there directed, and to the performance of which the promiſe of ſalvation is made, we may rejoice in hope of the glory which ſhall hereafter be revealed in us. But if not, if we cannot find thoſe tokens or evidences of grace, which are declared in the ſcripture; whatever elſe we find in ourſelves, we may reaſonably

bly conclude, we are yet alienated from the life of God, and are deſtitute of an intereſt in the great Mediator. No one hath authority to conſtitute any new way to ſalvation. There is—there can be no way, but that which God hath appointed—There can be no terms or conditions of final happineſs, but thoſe which are determined by the will of God—There can be no ſatisfactory marks, but thoſe which he hath pointed out in his word, or which by plain conſequence are deduced from them. God hath promiſed pardon and eternal life to thoſe who believe in Chriſt, repent of their ſins, and ſincerely obey the goſpel. If therefore we know that we have believed, repented, and ſubmitted to the divine government, we may be confident that we are in a ſtate of favor with God, and may enjoy the comfort which is the natural effect of ſuch a concluſion. So great, indeed, is the treachery of our hearts, and ſuch is our imperfection in faith and holineſs, that it is not an eaſy thing to determine whether we are true penitents, or whether our ſubmiſſion to Chriſt is ſincere or not. There is ſo great danger of our making a miſtake, and ſo many contrary reaſonings, that many are at a loſs what to think or judge of themſelves. To help us therefore in the determination of our ſtate, we have particular rules of trial, by which we are to ſearch and examine ourſelves. Thus for inſtance, we read of ſome, that God purified their hearts by faith. ‡ Do we then ſuppoſe that we are believers in Chriſt?

‡ Acts 15. 9.

We

We are to enquire, what effect our faith hath on our hearts, whether we see the moral turpitude there is in sin, so as that we desire and endeavor to abstain from it entirely and universally; whether we see the reasonableness and excellency of holiness, so as to press towards a perfect conformity to the law and will of God. Again, it is said, "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." † We are to enquire, whether we have universal benevolence to mankind, and a special regard to those who bear the image of God, and walk agreably to his commandments. Further we are to enquire, whether we are meek and patient, forgiving and forbearing; whether we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God; whether our affections are placed on things above and not on things on the earth; whether we grow in grace, in our love to God, in our regard to Jesus Christ, in a devout, humble, serious, christian temper. These are some of the marks which the scripture gives of the true christian; and if our conscience bear witness that they are to be found upon us, we may safely determine that this character belongs to us. "If our heart condemn us not, we have confidence towards God," and a scriptural foundation for comfort, peace, and joy. And this comfort, which arises from comparing our hearts and lives with the word of God, may properly be called the comfort of the Holy Ghost, as the scripture was given by inspiration of the blessed Spirit.

† 1 John 3. 14.

Holy

Holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt. Whatever comfortable words we find there, or whatever comfort we derive from any thing that is written there, may fitly be called the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt. For had not the Spirit in the word declared, what the conditions of the covenant of grace are, and what are the marks of God's children, our finding ever ſo many graces and virtues would not have been a juſt foundation for that peace and reſt, which a conformity to the chriſtian rule may now reaſonably afford us.

Secondly, The chriſtian's comfort may be aſcribed to the Holy Ghoſt, as the gracious diſpoſitions and holy converſation which are the proper evidence of his good ſtate, are the fruit and effect of the Spirit's influence on the mind. Under the laſt head we have proved, that nothing can be an evidence of our having an intereſt in the favor of God, but what is declared to be ſo in his word. Now if we look into the holy ſcriptures, we find, that men are repreſented as ſinners, tranſgreſſors of the law, and under a ſentence of condemnation—We are told, that God is in Chriſt reconciling the world unto himſelf, not imputing to them their treſpaſſes: They who were ſunk into the loweſt depths of miſery are raiſed to the higheſt hopes. But it is plain from the oracles of truth, that before men can have any title to the bleſſedneſs promiſed in the goſpel, it is neceſſary they ſhould paſs through a great moral

change,

change, or that the powers and faculties of their minds ſhould be renewed with reſpect to moral good and evil. So great is this change, that it is called a new creation, and they who experience it are ſaid to be new creatures; the meaning is, they think and act as if they were quite different perſons; they have other principles views and aims; they have a holy temper and diſpoſition, and endeavor to live in conformity to the rules of the goſpel. Agreably, chriſtians are ever deſcribed as holy perſons, by ſomething which belongs to the work of ſanctification. All the marks or rules of trial, which we have in the word of God, imply the exerciſe of ſome grace, or the practice of ſome virtue. "I know," ſays Dr. Sherlock, "no ſign of grace, but grace itſelf; no ſign of faith but believing; no ſign of temperance, but the government of our ſenſual inclinations; no ſign of being righteous, but doing righteouſneſs." It is from the exerciſe of grace, we are to determine that we have grace. A filial diſpoſition proves that we are the children of God; an imitation of the example of Chriſt proves that we are his diſciples; he that is ſanctified may be certain that he is juſtified; he who hath the temper of heaven may conclude he is an heir of heaven. —This is the proper ſcripture evidence, nor are we to look for any other.

No one hath any reaſon to expect an immediate teſtimony from heaven, either by a voice, or by inſpiration. You no where find it written in the ſa-

cred oracles, nor can you conclude from any thing there ſaid, that you are in a ſtate of favor with God, if you have a particular audible declaration, or a whiſper, a ſecret ſuggeſtion, a ſtrong impreſſion, a firm perſuaſion, that this is your happy privilege. Nor are you to draw this concluſion, becauſe you have ſome encouraging text, or gracious promiſe, brought to your mind, as that your ſins are forgiven, that God is your Father. The ſcripture doth not point out the particular perſons whoſe ſins are forgiven, or to whom the promiſes are made, but only reveals the character, marks, or qualifications, by which they are diſtinguiſhed from others; and therefore no one ought to determine that he is of this bleſſed number, unleſs he find that he hath this character, or thoſe qualifications, which the ſcripture makes the marks of the children of God. He whoſe ſoul is conformed to God's law, may know that his name is enrolled in the Lamb's book of life. A ſtory we have in one of the Roman hiſtorians agreably illuſtrates this point. A Senator relating to his ſon, the great honors decreed to a number of ſoldiers, whoſe names were written in a book, the ſon was importunate to ſee the book. The father ſhewed him the outſide, it ſeemed ſo glorious, that the ſon deſired him to open it; by no means, ſays the father, it is ſealed by the council. Then, ſaith the ſon, tell me if my name be there; the names, ſaith the father, are ſecret to the ſenate. The ſon ſtudying how he might get ſome ſatisfac-

tion,

tion, desired his father to declare the merits of those inscribed soldiers, which the father doing, and the son consulting his own heart, found himself to be none of them. The names of those whom God hath determined unto life are not revealed unto us; but the qualifications of those who shall enter into heaven are made known to us in God's holy word. It is plainly enough declared, that they are in a justified state, who love God, who delight in his law, who are pure in heart, who aim at a conformity to the nature and will of God in all things, who have a sincere regard to Jesus Christ, carefully imitate his holy example, and strive to be such as his gospel requires them to be, without any limitation or reserve. Holiness in heart and in life is the only genuine evidence that we are christians, the children of God, and heirs of eternal happiness; nothing without this ought to give rest and ease to our minds, but this is a good foundation for comfort peace and joy. "Our rejoicing," says the holy apostle, † "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

The comfort which we enjoy, in consequence of this holy temper and conduct, is justly ascribed to the Spirit of God, as it is by his influence we become holy, or do any thing as we ought to do. He converts

† 2 Cor. 1. 12.

converts the ſinner; He impreſſes the truths of God upon the mind; He cauſes them to have their genuine effect, and ſtrengthens to thoſe acts of virtue and holineſs which men perform. Chriſtians are therefore ſaid to be "born of the Spirit," to be "led by the Spirit," to "walk in the Spirit," we read of the ſanctification of the Spirit, of the indwelling of the Spirit, of the fruits of the Spirit, and many other expreſſions are uſed in ſcripture, which make it plain, that whatever holy diſpoſition there is in us, or whatever good is done by us, is the effect of divine grace, and owing to the agency or influence of the Spirit of God. What the Spirit doth in us, or enables us to do, is that, from whence we conclude, that we are the children of God, and have a title to eternal life. This bleſſed concluſion is an act of our own minds, but it is aſcribed to the Spirit, and called the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt, becauſe the matter of our comfort, or that by which we determine our ſtate to be good, proceeds from Him. The Spirit doth not immediately reveal to us that we are in a ſtate of grace, but we are to know this, by perceiving that we have the Spirit in his gracious fruits and effects within us. "Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, becauſe he hath given us of his Spirit." ‡

Thirdly, The peace of mind which the chriſtian enjoys is called the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt, as this

‡ 1 John 4. 13.

this Divine Perſon enables us to diſcern thoſe gracious fruits and effects which he hath produced in us. Although God hath teſtified in his word what are the marks of grace, or what is the proper ground of religious comfort and peace—Altho' every chriſtian hath more or leſs of that holineſs, which is the ſcriptural evidence that he is in a ſtate of favor with God; 'tis yet evident, that many chriſtians walk in darkneſs and have no light. The general reaſon of this is ſome defect in the chriſtian. But we have ſcripture warrant to conclude, that ſome ſpecial agency of the Spirit of God is neceſſary, to our enjoying that reſt and peace of mind, which religion lays a happy foundation for. The Spirit not only furniſhes that which is the matter of the evidence, but he convinces by the evidence. The matter of evidence is for ſubſtance in every chriſtian, but every chriſtian hath not the comfort which is the genuine effect of it. Every chriſtian hath grace, but every one, to whom this character belongs, doth not know that he is thus happy. He is indeed ſenſible of his own actions, he knows what he thinks, and what he does; but he is uncertain, whether his acts are gracious, or ſuch as prove him to be in a ſtate of grace.

A good man ſees ſo much in himſelf that is contrary to what he ought to be—ſo great a want of love to God—ſo little faith in Chriſt—ſuch an undue attachment to the world—ſo much formality

mingled

mingled with his higheſt acts of devotion, that he often hath fears, whether his heart is right, and his ſtate good—Many ſuſpicions, doubts and objections ariſe within him, even in his beſt frames. The more he encreaſes in holineſs, ſo much the more doth he abhor ſin, and ſo much the more uneaſineſs doth the ſin which he perceives in himſelf occaſion him—The more lively views he hath of the excellency of Chriſt, and of ſpiritual and eternal bleſſings; ſo much the more concern doth he feel, that he hath not a greater value for this glorious Mediator, and leſt he ſhould miſs of thoſe bleſſed privileges, immunities, and enjoyments, which his diſciples have a right to expect—The more ſtrong his faith in things that are future and inviſible, ſo much the more anxious is he about every thing which makes his title to them uncertain and dubious—This being the caſe, chriſtians are often heſitating and doubting; if ſometimes ready to hope they have an acquaintance with religion, from ſome ſenſible actings of grace, and an habitual regard to God in their converſation; yet a conſciouſneſs of ſin—ſin dwelling in them, and committed by them, makes them fearful of drawing ſo comfortable a concluſion. Such fears are, as hath been obſerved, owing to ſome weakneſs in them—To a weakneſs of grace, there is ſo little conformity of heart to God, that it is ſcarce diſcernible—or to a weakneſs in their underſtanding, which keeps them from making a right judgment of their ſtate.

To

To relieve them under this difficulty is part of the office of the Holy Spirit ; to reſolve their doubts, and bring them to a comfortable determination in this great point. Without this, he would not anſwer the character of a Comforter, whatever elſe he might do in them, or for them. It could afford a chriſtian but little conſolation, that he had the marks of God's children upon him, if he did not arrive at the knowlege of them. The Holy Ghoſt is a Spirit of conſolation, as he cauſes men to experience the comforts of religion, and ſometimes to " rejoice with joy unſpeakable and full of glory." Perhaps, our text hath a ſpecial reference to this particular agency of the Spirit, though by no means to the excluſion of his teſtimony in the word, and his ſanctifying influence on the mind, ſeparate from which there can be no reaſon for peace.

If any one enquire, How doth the Spirit bring us to diſcern the truth of grace ? I anſwer, one way in which he doth this is, by quickning us in the exerciſe of grace, and exciting us to greater diligence and activity in the work of the Lord. It is the nature of grace to evidence itſelf. The Spirit of God makes us feel the power of religion, and ſtrengthens us to ſuch lively actings of love, of faith, of repentance, of obedience, as are evidential. " While " grace," ſays one, " lies, as it were, dormant in the " ſoul, it is not ſo viſible, but eminent actings of " grace, in ſuch duties as are attended with peculiar

labor

" and ſelf-denial, carry with them their own evidence,
" with a more ſatisfying clearneſs.—When chriſ-
" tians are enlarged in any duty or grace, as truſt
" and reſignation to God, or charity to men; it
" affords them the happy occaſion of obſerving
" ſomething of the Spirit of God in them, ſome
" diſcernible lineaments of his image, ſomething
" that ſpeaks them his children, the objects of his
" favor, and the heirs of his kingdom. The emi-
" nent acts of grace carry light in them as well as
" heat, and tend to ſettle in the conſcience a per-
" ſuaſion of divine approbation and love."

But it hath been with reaſon ſuppoſed, that the Spirit enables chriſtians to diſcern the truth of grace in a ſtill more direct way; that is, by enlarging, ſtrengthening, and enlightning our underſtandings, in judging concerning our moral or ſpiritual actions. Why ſhould this be thought at all more irrational, than his ſhining into our hearts to give us the knowledge of the truth? While the ſaints are deſirous to know their ſtate towards God, and are enquiring into the foundation of their hope, the Spirit may give them a more clear underſtanding of the covenant of grace, may lead them to more juſt ſentiments of the nature of grace or evangelical holineſs, may enable them to diſcern their ſincere acquieſcence in the method of ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt, their deſires after God and a conformity to him: He may ſcatter their doubts, ſilence their

objections,

objections, bear down their contrary reaſonings, and encourage them to believe, not only, that ſuch ſinful unworthy creatures as they are, may partake of thoſe great and comprehenſive bleſſings which Chriſt hath purchaſed, but, that what now paſſes in their minds is real holineſs, and of conſequence that they are gracious perſons, or in a ſtate of grace.

All this the Spirit may do in a ſecret imperceptible way, while they are in the exerciſe of their reaſoning powers, ſo that they may be unable to diſtinguiſh his operations from the acts of their own minds. He doth not fill chriſtians with joy and peace they know not why, nor without their perceiving any reaſon of the hope that is within them. He ſtrengthens their holy diſpoſitions, aſſiſts to holy practice, and then helps them to perceive and determine, that theſe holy exerciſes are the true ſcripture marks of God's children. And it is not eaſy to conceive, how there can be a more reaſonable ground of rejoicing, than the firm perſuaſion of this high relation to the bleſſed God; and a lively view and hope of the bleſſedneſs that is connected with it in the word. This perſuaſion is in itſelf highly delightful, it is an earneſt of heaven, a prelibation of that felicity which awaits the ſaints in another ſtate and world. Therefore the apoſtle prays for the Romans, "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghoſt."

I have now ſaid why the chriſtian's comforts are aſcribed to the Holy Ghoſt. I only add under this head, that by *walking* in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt, it is intimated, that the chriſtians ſpoken of in the text enjoyed for a ſpace of time, or a ſeaſon, the bleſſed tokens of divine love, or a joyful ſenſe of their intereſt in the favor of God through Jeſus Chriſt. It intends that they had ſomething more than a ſudden flow of paſſion, or ſome tranſient pleaſure; that as their chriſtian temper continued, ſo their peace and comfort continued likewiſe. A happineſs this beyond expreſſion! They only who have had experience of it know how great it is! A ſtranger intermeddleth not with this joy.

I proceed to the Second general head, which is to conſider the connection between walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt—or between the duties and comforts of religion. Our text connects them together, and thereby, as I obſerved in opening the words, intimates, that this is the moſt likely way to attain that peace and reſt, which is moſt deſirable in itſelf, and which we in vain purſue in any other way. And I preſume, after what hath been already ſaid, very little need be added to prove this point.——If the religion of Chriſt is adapted to afford relief and eaſe to the mind of man—If it is from the exerciſe of grace we are to determine that we are heirs

of

of the promiſes—If the only way to attain the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt is, by his enabling us to diſcern thoſe holy diſpoſitions which he hath produced in us, and which he hath in the ſcripture made the marks of God's children—If this is the true ſtate of the caſe, then certainly the beſt way to know our ſtate, and to have the comforts of religion is to keep our graces in a conſtant and vigorous exerciſe, or to walk in the fear of the Lord. —The more we act under the influence of religion, and walk anſwerably to our chriſtian character, the clearer is the evidence that we are in a ſtate of favor with God—The more we grow in grace, the ſtronger is the proof that we have grace—The more we have of a filial temper, the more certain it will be that we are the children of God. "The work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance forever." Peace in our own minds is the proper genuine effect of the practice of righteouſneſs, as the practice of righteouſneſs proves, that we have an intereſt in the promiſes, and a right to eternal life and happineſs. Therefore the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking of the commandments of the Lord, ſays, "In keeping of them there is great reward."*

Further, while we walk in the fear of the Lord, or live in the practice of holineſs, we are moſt likely to have thoſe ſpecial influences of the Spirit, which

* Pſalm 19. 11.

which are neceſſary to our diſcerning the grace of God in our ſouls, and to our having the comfort of ſuch diſcernment. "Thou meeteſt him," ſays the prophet, "that rejoiceth, and worketh righteouſneſs, thoſe that remember thee in thy ways." ¶ We muſt follow after holineſs if we would enjoy the comforts of religion. It is a juſt puniſhment upon thoſe chriſtians who are negligent and ſlothful in the work of the Lord, that they are in doubt and perplexity about their ſtate. It is only the fruitful that can expect to be the comfortable chriſtian. As it is in temporals, ſo alſo is it in ſpirituals, the diligent hand maketh rich. And certainly, nothing could be more wiſely ordered: We are exceeding apt, notwithſtanding this powerful motive to diligence, to ſlacken and grow remiſs in our chriſtian courſe, would not this criminal temper be more prevalent, if we met with no difficulties in our way, but enjoyed uninterrupted eaſe and quiet, whether we were diligent or not?—But on the other hand, what a ſtimulus is it to the greateſt vigor and activity, when by a ſtedfaſt adherance to the rules of our holy religion, and in this way only, we have reaſon to expect that peace, comfort and joy, which the goſpel lays a bleſſed foundation for! Whether therefore, that is the immediate ſenſe of the apoſtle Peter or not, it is certainly a very good ſenſe, in which moſt expoſitors underſtand the exhortation, "Give diligence to make your calling and election ſure." †

This

¶ Iſaiah 64. 5. † 2 Peter 1. 10.

This perſuaſion of their good ſtate is not to be obtained merely by reflecting on what is paſt, there muſt be continued action; the apoſtle ſpeaks of chriſtians, as "forgetting the things that were behind, and reaching to thoſe that were before." This expreſſion doth not mean, that a chriſtian is to take no notice of the experience he hath had of the power of religion on his ſoul; it muſt be a great advantage in forming a judgment of himſelf, to have had opportunity to try his graces, eſpecially in ſcenes of great difficulty and ſelf-denial; to find that he hath been able to withſtand peculiar temptations, and to endure uncommon trials of his faith and virtue. The recollection of ſuch victories cannot but afford great ſatisfaction to the mind; but there will ariſe, even in the midſt of ſuch pleaſing reflections, many doubts and ſuſpicions of his ſincerity, unleſs he finds a preſent correſpondence to the law and will of God. Our paſt experience of the efficacy of religion may give us ſome hope that we have paſſed from death to life; and where there is the preſent activity of grace, will abundantly ſtrengthen the evidence, that we are ſincere diſciples of Chriſt; but it cannot alone carry the mind above all fear of a deception, and afford that ſettled peace and comfort which every good man aſpires after. Unleſs I can ſay with the pſalmiſt, "I love the Lord," or with the apoſtle, "I know in whom I have believed." Unleſs I find a preſent regard to God and to his law, and a diſpoſition to

preſs towards the mark, to encreaſe in grace and holineſs, I have reaſon to ſuſpect whether I know any thing of religion, and have not been deceived in what is paſt, that hath had a goodly appearance. It is the prevalence of love that caſts out fear ; if divine love decays, doubts naturally ariſe. And as much imperfection attends the higheſt exerciſe of grace in our preſent imperfect ſtate, many good divines have queſtioned whether abſolute aſſurance, or ſuch as excludes all doubts, is attainable on this ſide heaven. " The higheſt aſſurance in this life," ſays Mr. Willard, " is that which needs ſtrengthing. A believer's grace is imperfect, and his corruptions potent ; and perfect aſſurance is not conſiſtent with imperfect grace. Hence believers are ever put on the work of ſelf-examination."——" If there be ſuch abſolute aſſurance," ſays Mr. Flavel, " as to be no doubt nor danger, there is no place nor room for examination, or further endeavors to make it ſurer than it is."——" Such an evidence, conviction, or perſuaſion of our acceptance with God," ſays Dr. Owen, " as are excluſive of all contrary reaſonings, that ſuffer the ſoul to hear nothing of objections, that free and quiet it from all aſſaults, are neither mentioned in the ſcriptures, nor conſiſtent with that ſtate wherein we walk before God, nor poſſible on account of Satan's will and ability to tempt, or of our own remaining unbelief." There is, notwithſtanding, ſuch an hope through grace, a hope ſo far preponderating all doubts, as may, without any great impropriety, be term'd aſſurance, as

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it very much anſwers the end for which any one would deſire an abſolute certainty; to encourage the chriſtian in his ſpiritual conflicts, to enable him to take comfort in the promiſes, to fill him with joy and peace in believing, and to give him ſome prelibation of the bleſſedneſs of heaven. "Theſe things," ſays our bleſſed Saviour, "have I ſpoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." ‡ And with what confidence doth the apoſtle Paul ſpeak, "I know whom I have believed, and I am perſuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him againſt that day!" §

I am ſenſible, ſome of you will be ready to object againſt the account I have given of the chriſtian's joy, that it ſeems to ſuppoſe a long courſe of reaſoning, whereas God hath ſometimes ſhed abroad a ſenſe of his love, as it were, at once. Good men have had an immediate witneſs of the Spirit, that they were the children of God, and have been ſuddenly filled with comfort peace and joy.

To this it may be replied,—If by an *immediate* witneſs is intended, a teſtimony from heaven without any means, or any thing intervening, it can be nothing elſe than an immediate revelation, that they are in a pardoned ſanctified ſtate, which the ſcripture gives us no reaſon to expect: Chriſtians are not

‡ John 15. 11. § 2 Timothy 1. 8.

not to know their filial relation to God by an *immediate* declaration, or ſecret ſuggeſtion; they can know it only by the declarations and promiſes of the word, and therefore only by their finding in themſelves that evidence of their regeneration which is agreable to the ſcriptures.—If by *immediate* is intended no more than inſtant, or preſent with regard to time: I deny not, that chriſtians have ſometimes had ſuch witneſs or evidence, of their being born of God. But even here, I ſee no reaſon at preſent to ſuppoſe, that they have attained an aſſurance of their good ſtate, without any regard to the word, or without their diſcerning the exerciſe of any grace in themſelves. The caſe may be thus, the chriſtian being before well acquainted with the rules laid down in ſcripture, and which are there made the marks and ſigns of God's children, hath ſome lively exerciſe of the chriſtian temper, or finds a holy love to God excited to ſuch a vigorous exerciſe, as leaves no room to doubt, that it is what it appears to be; it carries it's own evidence, and gives full and immediate conviction, that it is the very temper, which in the word is made the mark or character of God's children. This inſtantly fills him with a ſacred divine joy, with the peace of God which paſſes all underſtanding. Here is no long reaſoning—no courſe of argumentation—nothing which may not paſs in an inſtant, almoſt a moment of time.

If in this account of things I differ from ſome eminent Divines, I can truly ſay, I have delivered what appears to me the ſenſe of ſcripture; ſure I am, I have no deſign to limit the holy One of Iſrael, where the word of God gives us the leaſt warrant to look for his divine influence.

IMPROVEMENT.

Firſt, How much reaſon have we to be thankful for the new covenant; which lays ſuch a happy foundation for peace with God, and for peace in our own minds! The law of our nature required indefectible obedience—an abſolute conformity to the nature and will of God. When we compare ourſelves with this law, in how many inſtances do we offend daily? And in what one inſtance do we perfectly anſwer it's demands? This law therefore condemns us. All the aſſurance the firſt covenant gave of the favor of God was to thoſe who never violated it:—To the ſinner, it breathes nothing but indignation and wrath. A gracious God hath looked upon us with pity in our ſtate of imperfection and ſin; and hath provided a kind Deliverer—an almighty Saviour. He hath ſent his Son, in our nature, to atone for our offences, and to make way for our reconciliation to him. Pardon is proclaimed—& not pardon, only—We may thro' the grace of the goſpel, expect every thing neceſſary to the perfection of our nature in holineſs and happineſs.

This happineſs is not diſpenſed promiſcuouſly to all the children of men, it is promiſed to them who believe, to them who are pure in heart, to them that do his commandments. But when the goſpel ſpeaks of holineſs in general, or any particular grace, as a qualification for the bleſſings of the new covenant; it doth not—it cannot intend perfect holineſs, or the exerciſe of grace without any mixture of ſinful imperfection: It intends, that we aim at that which is right—that we have a ſincere regard to God in our moral conduct—that our love is ſupremely fixed on him, ſo that no other object hath an equal place in our hearts, tho' we do not love him ſo much as we ought—that we allow ourſelves in nothing that is contrary to the will of God—are heartily grieved when we do amiſs—and daily preſs after higher attainments. Where there is ſuch godly ſincerity, we may be aſſured we are in a ſtate of acceptance. Though all the connection there is between any goodneſs of our's, and any favor we receive from God, is owing entirely to his mercy and grace, yet the connection between true evangelical purity, and the bleſſings of the new covenant, is quite certain, being founded on the promiſe of the true and faithful God. A holy love to God, exhibiting itſelf in a correſpondent temper and conduct, proves that we are chriſtians, in a ſtate of favor with God, and in the number of thoſe whom he will receive to glory. One who hath a full perſuaſion of this may reaſonably

rejoice

rejoice in God, and believe that his redemption draweth near. How much reaſon is there from this view of things, to bleſs the name of God, for that covenant of peace which is the foundation of all !

Secondly, From what hath been ſaid, the moſt of us may learn the true reaſon why we have not the comforts of religion. Whatever other cauſes there may be of that darkneſs which afflicts the minds of many, yet have we not reaſon to judge and condemn ourſelves ? Can we wonder that God hides his face from us, when we have had ſo little of a holy filial fear of him—have been ſo unmindful of him—and ſo negligent of our duty to him ? If we have any grace, ah ! how languid ! how almoſt imperceptible is it ! May we not juſtly ſuſpect, and be diffident of ourſelves ? Have we not often grieved that good Spirit, whereby chriſtians are ſealed to the day of redemption ? Can we expect the Holy Ghoſt will favor us with his comforting viſits, when that temple which ought to have been devoted wholly to him, hath harboured ſo many diſorderly paſſions, and impure luſts, which are directly oppoſite to his holy nature ? Our own conſciences can bear but a feeble teſtimony for us, who have, in many inſtances, neglected duty—in many, acted in contradiction to it—and in our beſt actions have been greatly deficient. And if our own minds and conſciences do not teſtify in our favor,

how

how can we have the witneſs of the Spirit of God, who is ſaid to witneſs with our ſpirits? If our hearts condemn us, how can we have confidence towards God?

Thirdly, What hath been ſaid teaches us how to prove and to try our comforts. Examination is a great and important duty; but in order to our having any advantage from it, it is neceſſary that we examine by a right rule: Our general directory is the word of God: This contains all thoſe ſigns and marks by which we are to prove ourſelves: They all amount to this—a conformity, in ſome degree, to the holy nature and will of God. We muſt therefore look into ourſelves to know our true ſtate. If we are reconciled to God, we ſhall find in ourſelves a change from what we were—we ſhall have the exerciſe of grace in our ſouls—and we ſhall bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in our converſation. Is this the caſe with us? if it is, what better evidence can we have that we are true chriſtians.—If the Spirit enable us to diſcern his work, we have no reaſon to queſtion our right to his conſolations.—But if you do not walk in the fear of God, in vain do you pretend to walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghoſt.—Are you the children of God, where is your child-like temper? Are you created anew in Chriſt Jeſus, where are your good works? Are you the diſciples of Chriſt,

where

where is your ſelf-denial—your meekneſs—your reſignation—your purity—your contempt of the world—your zeal for God—and your love to mankind ?—There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked.

Fourthly, Would you walk in the comfort of the HolyGhoſt, be very careful to walk in the fear of the Lord. You muſt be juſtified by faith, and have peace with God thro' our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, or you cannot rejoice in hope of the glory of God. You muſt have grace, before you can know that you have it. Make it, therefore, your conſtant prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right ſpirit." Be ever watchful over your heart, and careful of your life. Attend every duty in it's place. Be frequent and regular in the exerciſes of piety and devotion. Shew a proper regard to the great Redeemer and Saviour of men. Repent of your ſins. Be holy in all manner of converſation. And continually labor to be wiſer and better. This is the way to attain that peace and reſt which a chriſtian cannot but deſire, though it is not the main thing he ought to deſire. It is of more importance to be in a ſtate of favor with God, than to know that this is our happy privilege—It is better to be religious, than to be aſſured that this is our juſt character. "There is many a one who might have been in a much more

more comfortable ſtate than he is, if he had minded his comfort leſs and his duty more; if he had ſtudied more the pleaſing of God, than the pleaſure, peace, and ſatisfaction of his own mind; if he had labored more to be a true obedient child of God, than to know that he is ſo." However, no one ought to be contented—no chriſtian can be contented, without knowing his true character. This is not only neceſſary to a life of comfort and joy, but tends greatly to promote a life of holineſs.

Laſtly, If you are ſo happy as to have the comforts of religion, give to God the glory of his grace, praiſe him for what he hath done, and for what he hath promiſed to do: Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jeſus Chriſt. To him be glory forever—AMEN.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

The Obligations to Family-Religion.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

..... But as for me and my houſe, we will ſerve the Lord.

THIS is the cloſe of Joſhua's noble and ſpirited addreſs to the people of Iſrael. Having given them an hiſtorical account of the great things God had done for their fathers and for them, he concludes with this very ſolemn application— "Now therefore fear the Lord, and ſerve him in ſincerity and in truth: And put away the gods which your fathers ſerved on the other ſide the flood, and in Egypt; and ſerve ye the Lord. And if it ſeem evil unto you to ſerve the Lord, chuſe

you

you this day whom ye will ſerve; whether the gods whom your fathers ſerved that were on the other ſide of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whoſe land ye dwell:—But as for me and my houſe, we will ſerve the Lord." Though all Iſrael ſhould prefer ſome other god, it was his fixed reſolution to ſerve Jehovah, and to command his houſe to adhere to him. He and his family would maintain the cauſe and worſhip of the true God, tho' there ſhould be none to join them. Joſhua could not anſwer for his family, that they ſhould have an inward veneration of the ſupreme Being; but he could determine, that no one ſhould reſide with him, who would not unite in a viſible acknowledgement of the God of Iſrael.

This great and good man firſt determined for himſelf, that he would ſerve the Lord. Heads of families ſhould themſelves ſet an example of piety, or all their endeavors with thoſe under their care will be to little purpoſe. But the reſolution of Joſhua extended further; he conſidered himſelf as the Maſter and governor of a family, and obliged to ſomething more than perſonal religion, and therefore ſays, "as for me and *my houſe*, we will ſerve the Lord;" intimating his firm reſolution to maintain the worſhip of God in his houſe; and to make uſe of the authority with which God and nature had inveſted him, to oblige his houſhold to attend upon

upon it. Theſe words are therefore a proper foundation for a diſcourſe upon family-religion.

Agreably, my preſent deſign is to ſhow, that it is incumbent on every one who is at the head of a family, to maintain the worſhip of God in his houſe, or to ſerve the Lord with his houſhold.

Upon this point, I am perſuaded we ſhall have very few to oppoſe us, except thoſe, who from their diſinclination to religion itſelf, and to every expreſſion of it, deſire to frame excuſes for their neglect. If ſocial worſhip is ever reaſonable, nature itſelf will lead us to family religion. Who are ſo adapted to unite together in exerciſes of devotion, as they who are united together in ſome very near relation, or in the moſt intimate bonds of friendſhip? one of which, we muſt ſuppoſe, is the caſe with all who are of the ſame family. Theſe, in ordinary caſes, beſt know each other's circumſtances, cares and difficulties, and therefore can more properly join in praying with and for each other. They muſt have many common wants, which they may, in a united manner, ſeek to have ſupplied—They have many common mercies, which demand their thankful acknowledgments—They are uſually affected with the ſame afflictions, which ought to lead them to God for help and ſupport. The more devout heathen had their houſhold gods, to whom they committed themſelves; and will it not be a ſhame

to chriſtians, if there is a leſs appearance of religion in their houſes, than was to be found in the houſes of thoſe who knew not the true God. There is a particular obligation on heads of families to promote the everlaſting happineſs of thoſe under their care. But how poorly will the duties of inſtruction, of counſel, of a conſtant watch over their early ſteps, be performed, if we never pray with them. And it is much to be feared, that thoſe parents and maſters who wholly neglect to pray *with* their children and ſervants, do ſcarce ever pray *for* them, or even, I had almoſt ſaid, for themſelves. That they have an habitual ſpirit of indevotion, and very little regard to God and religion.

The ſcriptures do, in a very clear manner, intimate family worſhip to be a duty. We do not aſſert, that there is any precept, which, in plain and direct terms, enjoyns this practice; the reaſon of this omiſſion is not, becauſe family-worſhip is not a duty, as ſome would argue; but, becauſe it is ſo plain a duty, and ſo evidently approves itſelf to the conſciences of thoſe who have a juſt ſenſe of religion, that there was no need of an expreſs injunction. There are ſome truths, and thoſe of great importance, taken for granted by the ſacred writers, or which are only implied in what they deliver. Theſe truths ſo readily ſtrike the mind, that there was no occaſion for their being propoſed in any other way. When Moſes was about to give the hiſtory of the creation,

creation, he doth not ſay in expreſs terms, there is a God, which is the foundation of all revelation, and all religion : He goes upon the hypotheſis, that his readers believed the exiſtence of an all-perfect Deity, and begins with ſaying, " In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We are not explicitly commanded to pray in ſecret at any particular times, but are only directed with reſpect to the manner in which ſecret prayer is to be performed, " Thou when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in ſecret." It is a point taken for granted, that good men would have their ſeaſons for prayer, and the taking it for granted in this manner is, perhaps, the ſtrongeſt way of expreſſing the expectation of the God of heaven.

This is the caſe with reſpect to family prayer ; It is no where expreſsly injoined as a duty, but it is plainly intimated that it is. We read, § " Likewiſe ye huſbands, dwell with them" (your wives) " according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as the weaker veſſel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered." The moſt natural conſtruction of theſe words is, that huſbands ſhould treat their wives with tenderneſs and reſpect, leſt any uneaſineſs ſhould ariſe, that would diſturb their minds, and render them unfit for thoſe exerciſes of ſocial worſhip, which it was ſuppoſed they would maintain.

§ 1 Peter 3. 7.

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The apoſtle aimed to encourage theſe neareſt of earthly relatives in frequent acts of ſocial worſhip, as the beſt method to preſerve them in holineſs and virtue, and particularly to promote a mutual regard and affection for each other.

We find this was the practice of thoſe, whoſe names are recorded with honor in the ſacred oracles.——When we are told of the removes of the Patriarchs, we read alſo of their building an altar to call on the name of the Lord; and it was very ſeldom that any devout men offered their ſacrifices in private; it is much more probable, that their families were called to unite with them in theſe exerciſes of piety.—It was Joſhua's reſolution in our text, "as for me and my houſe we will ſerve the Lord," in which, as hath been already obſerved, he muſt refer to that religious worſhip, which he had determined to maintain in his houſe, for no otherwiſe could he engage for his houſe, that they ſhould ſerve the Lord.—And it is obſervable, that, amidſt all the feſtivity and pomp of that illuſtrious day, when David brought home the ark, and notwithſtanding the holy tranſport to which this pious Prince was raiſed on this joyful occaſion, he retired from the public ſolemnity, "to bleſs his houſhold." * What can this intend, but that he went to pray with his family, and to implore the divine bleſſing upon them? In no other way could

"he

* 2 Samuel 6. 20.

" he bleſs his houſhold." It is probable, that when he found the time for his family worſhip was come, he left the ſacred feſtival in which he had been engaged, that he might attend this more private exerciſe of religion.—It is reaſonably ſuppoſed, that the devotion of Daniel, which he ſo ſteadily attended, notwithſtanding the wicked decree contrived on purpoſe to deſtroy him, was family prayer. " He went into his houſe, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jeruſalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks to his God, as he did aforetime." † Had this been ſecret or cloſet prayer, it might eaſily have been concealed from his enemies; however they might ſuſpect, they could not prove his violation of the king's edict; and it is hardly ſuppoſable, that he would make his ſecret devotions public, on purpoſe to furniſh evidence againſt himſelf. It is ſaid, his windows were open towards Jeruſalem, this was his uſual practice, not for oſtentation, or that others might hear, but to ſhow his regard to the God of Iſrael, and to ſtrengthen his faith and confidence in Him, by looking towards his holy temple, the place where God had recorded his name, and where his preſence had been wont to reſide.—We read of Cornelius, " He was a devout man, who feared God, with all his houſe." ‡ It was a religious family, a houſe in which God was worſhipped. Cornelius was at prayer in his houſe, § or

† Daniel 6. 10. ‡ Acts 10. 2. § Verſe 30.

or with his houſhold, when an angel was ſent from heaven, to teſtify God's approbation of him, and to direct him to further means of inſtruction and improvement.

Family worſhip having been the practice of good men in all ages, we may reaſonably ſuppoſe the apoſtle intended to include it, when he directed chriſtians to pray "always with all prayer." ‖—Nor is there any reaſon to think this was a duty peculiar to thoſe days, or which was practiſed only by ſaints of an eminent character. It is a duty ſo fit —ſo reaſonable—and ſo agreable to the firſt notions of religion, that I cannot eaſily conceive of any objection which a devout mind can have to it.

It is not for me peremptorily to fix the ſeaſons when this duty is to be attended: In this every maſter of a family hath an undoubted right to think and judge for himſelf. But nature itſelf ſeems to direct to the morning and evening.——When we have been carried through the paſſages of the day; and are met together in our common habitation, that we may again ſeparate for our neceſſary repoſe; what can be more fit and decent, than that we ſhould, with one heart and voice, bleſs God for the favors and protections of the day—humble ourſelves for our miſcarriages—and implore *his* care, through the ſilent watches of the night, of whom it is ſaid, that He

‖ Epheſians 6. 18.

He neither ſlumbers nor ſleeps ?——When in the morning we ariſe from our beds, how natural is it, before we enter on the buſineſs of the day, to return our thanks to Him who hath protected us in our defenceleſs hours—to aſk the direction, care, and bleſſing of our heavenly Father—and to commit ourſelves to his guidance and influence, thro' the buſineſs and temptations of the day ?—How beautiful is prayer in theſe returning ſeaſons ?—How pleaſing muſt it be to God to obſerve our devout acknowlegements ? Next to the ſatisfaction which He hath in himſelf, and in his own divine excellencies, He takes pleaſure in the homage and obedience of the creatures which He hath made ; Both, as by their right conduct they honor Him ; and as, at the ſame time, they advance their own happineſs. Whenever we approach Him in our acts of religious and ſocial worſhip, we own Him as the greateſt and beſt of beings—as the fountain of all good—and as ready to extend his goodneſs to his creatures : We acknowlege our dependance upon Him, and our obligations to Him. This is to ſhew forth his glory. What a happy effect is ſuch a devout practice like to have on our own ſouls, and on the ſouls of thoſe who are under our care !—What honorable ſentiments of God will it naturally introduce into the minds of children, and other young perſons, who generally conſtitute a great part of families, when, every morning and evening, a ſacrifice of prayer and praiſe is offered up to Him. I

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What venerable conceptions will they form of this all-perfect Being, when they hear their parents and maſters, whom they are taught to honor and reverence, daily acknowleging his ſuperintendency over us, and all our concerns! How doth it tend to fix in their breaſts, a ſenſe of the preſence, the perfection, the government of God; when they obſerve, that we dare not engage in buſineſs, nor retire to reſt, without a ſolemn addreſs to Him, devoutly imploring his favor, protection, and aſſiſtance! But at the ſame time, what an amiable repreſentation doth it give of the Lord and Father of all, when they conſider Him, as admitting us guilty ſinners into his preſence, allowing us to breathe out the deſires of our ſouls before Him, and giving us the greateſt encouragement to hope for audience and acceptance!

While family religion hath this happy tendency to produce in us and our's, juſt thoughts of the bleſſed God, it may alſo greatly advance our mutual eaſe and comfort. Our united devotions will naturally unite our hearts in love and affection: They tend to ſuppreſs all unchriſtian wrath, fierce reſentment, and indecent murmurings; to promote a ſpirit of tenderneſs, and forbearance on the one part—duty and ſubmiſſion on the other—kindneſs and benevolence in all: They are happily calculated to make thoſe under our care truly religious, and religion will make them whatſoever elſe they ought to be—obedient children—faithful

ſervants.

ſervants. It will make every one good in every relation, and will ſecure the faithful performance of every ſocial duty.

In ſpeaking of Family-religion, I have confined myſelf to the article of devotion, not becauſe this contains the whole of the duty; family inſtruction —reading the word of God—counſelling, warning, and reſtraining thoſe under our care—and every kind of family-government, come under this head; but as a ſingle diſcourſe would not allow of a diſtinct conſideration of theſe particulars, ſo I look on family-prayer to be the leading duty. Where this is neglected, the other are like to be neglected alſo. Where this is attended with ſerioufneſs and ſolemnity, the other will ſeldom be omitted.

Your time will not allow me to enter upon a particular conſideration of the manner, in which God is to be worſhipped in our houſes. Doubtleſs, thoſe prayers which are offered up from pure hearts, and in the exerciſe of ſuitable graces, are moſt acceptable to this All-perfect Being; and, in a ſtrict ſenſe, theſe are the only ſacrifices that will be acceptable to Him. But as it is a principle, which may have very dangerous conſequences, that they who are not in a ſtate of acceptance with God are not obliged to pray at all; ſo is it alſo, that they are not obliged to pray in their families. A neglect of family-worſhip is a direct affront offered to the

Majeſty of Heaven, and puts us out of the way of a bleſſing. There is a principle of conſcience in unregenerate men, a ſenſe and impreſſion of duty, which often leads them to do that which is in itſelf right; which awakens them to attend the means of grace and the exerciſes of religion; gives them a degree of ſerioufneſs and ſolemnity of mind; and excites in them deſires after ſpiritual bleſſings: and it may be of advantage to attend family prayer from ſuch principles, when there is no higher. Their prayers may ſerve, by the bleſſing of God, to make thoſe who lead in theſe religious exerciſes, wiſer and better, and they may have a happy effect upon others. Beſides, if they who are heads of families are not themſelves ſincere chriſtians, yet there may be ſincere chriſtians in their families, and theſe may offer up ſpiritual ſacrifices, they may lift up holy hands, when they join in the addreſſes of thoſe who are not holy; God may hear them praying by others; and, in anſwer to their prayers, beſtow bleſſings on the families to which they belong. I proceed to the

APPLICATION.

And in the firſt place, I ſhall addreſs thoſe who practice the duty of family-worſhip. Beloved Brethren, continue inſtant in prayer. As often as the ſtated ſeaſons return upon you, and theſe, I hope, are as often as the return of morning and evening, let your prayers be going up to God—Let not

a light matter, or a trivial excuſe, prevail with you to put by your family devotions. I own, there may be ſome extraordinary occaſions which afford a ſufficient reaſon for omitting them; as when our temporal intereſt is likely to be very greatly injured, or when our neighbours, whom we are to love as ourſelves, are in great danger. But we ſhould be very careful, not to make excuſes for omitting this important duty, when there is not a real exigency, or the call to ſome other duty is not quite apparent. In moſt caſes that occur, we may have our family devotions, and either by ſhortening them, or by attending them a little earlier or later, may do what neceſſity or charity requires.

But let us not content ourſelves with a bare attendance on theſe duties of religion. If the prayers of his people are acceptable to God, it is as they are ſpiritual ſacrifices. The more our hearts are engaged in them, ſo much the more agreable they will be to that God, who hath pleaſure in uprightneſs. If we are not very watchful, theſe frequently returning exerciſes will degenerate into mere form and cuſtom. Too many, it is to be feared, content themſelves with the performance, without attending to the frame of their minds. Their hearts are far from God, while they draw near to Him with their lips; and there is no inward devotion, when they profeſs ſolemnly to addreſs Him. They hurry over a few good words, in a careleſs

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and irreverent manner, and call it family worſhip. But this is not prayer—it is not religion—ſuch ſacrifices cannot be pleaſing to the heart-ſearching God, altho' they ſhould be offered by thoſe whom he loves: for it muſt be owned that good men are often faulty in this reſpect, they are too ſlight and perfunctory in their family-devotions. Whenever we addreſs the God of glory, the amazing diſtance between us ſhould impreſs our minds, with a holy awe, and the moſt profound humility. That we may be in the beſt frame to attend family worſhip, it will be well for thoſe who are engaged in buſineſs, to order things ſo, as to have this duty over in the morning, before they enter on their worldly affairs; and ſo ſeaſonably in the evening, as that neither they who lead, nor they who join in the devotions, may be in a ſleepy drowſy frame, the conſequence of which will be inattention, and irreverence.

Secondly, I am to apply myſelf to thoſe head of families who live in the habitual neglect of family worſhip. If this is a duty, the neglect of it muſt be infinitely diſpleaſing to a holy God. He requires that you acknowlege Him in all your ways, but you live, as if there were no God to be acknowleged, or you were under no obligation to obey and ſerve him.—If there are any ſuch prayerleſs heads of families now preſent before the Lord, (and would to God there were none) I muſt plainly

ly tell you, the sin of such neglect lies at your door. To you it belongs, to set up the worship of God in your houses, and to take effectual care that all who are committed to your charge, whether children or servants, attend upon it.

It may be difficult to bring yourselves to attend this duty, when you have lived any time in the omission of it. You are ashamed, to let your domestics see that you have neglected what you ought to have practised—to confess, by an alteration of your conduct, that you have been wrong heretofore. But remember those words of our Saviour, "whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels." * Are not you among those who are ashamed of Christ, who omit a known duty, lest you should be despised for having neglected it? How terrible the thought of being raised to shame and everlasting contempt!—If you could be prevailed upon to begin, the main difficulty would be over; you would find the work easy and pleasant. —You object, that by entering on family religion now, you shall implicitly condemn your-self—your children and servants will despise you. But do not your own consciences condemn you, while you live without any religious acknowlegement of God in your houses?—Should you be called before the tribunal

* Mark 8. 38.

bunal of a holy and juſt God, have you not reaſon to fear he would condemn you ?—Thoſe very children and ſervants, by whom you imagine you ſhall be lightly-eſteemed, if they have any degree of ſeriouſneſs—if they are not, by your example, made forgetful of God, and thoughtleſs about religion, cannot but look upon you as negligent of your duty to God, and to them ; which will of courſe leſſen that reverence and regard they would otherwiſe have for you. I ſay, if they are not forgetful of God and unconcerned about religion ;—But conſider, what a dreadful tendency your irreligious courſe of life hath to harden their minds, and to render them proof againſt every conſideration that can be propoſed to them !

Children are very apt to form themſelves by their parents, and to think all is right which they ſee them do. Eſpecially are they ready to follow them when their example doth not contradict their natural propenſities. It is difficult for pious parents to reſtrain their children, and to keep them within the bounds ſet by reaſon and religion, but it is not difficult for wicked parents to lead them aſtray—Melancholy is the influence which the bad example of parents and heads of families hath upon thoſe who are under them !—If children ſee their parents vicious, is it not to be feared they will be vicious too ?—If their parents neglect God, is it to be wondered at that they alſo neglect Him ?—And

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can you wiſh to be!—can you bear the thought of being—the inſtruments of the future ruin of thoſe you brought into being—of thoſe ſouls which were committed to your charge! You love your children, and will you not do all you can to preſerve them from everlaſting burnings? What an aggravation will it be of your miſery, if you have the guilt not only of your own, but your children's ſins lying upon you!—Methinks, theſe conſiderations, if you ſuffer them to have their due weight, muſt abundantly preponderate the thought of appearing contemptible in the eyes of thoſe who are placed under your care, by owning you have done amiſs, ſuppoſing they would really deſpiſe you.—But this is ſo far from being certain, that it is probable, the effect would be quite contrary—that they would rather eſteem and honour you. It is impoſſible, but they ſhould take notice of your neglect; and if they come to years of thought, they will know it to be a neglect of duty: They will obſerve, you do not live and practice as your neighbours do; and will naturally think, it is becauſe you are not ſo good as your neighbours are; and will deſpiſe you in their hearts. If you do not render to God that honor, which, as your Father and Maſter, He expects and claims from you; how can you reaſonably expect, that your children and ſervants ſhould yield you that reſpect which you demand from them! Think with yourſelf, when about to rebuke or correct a child for irreverence and

diſobedience—

diſobedience—What a wretch am I!—Who withhold from my heavenly Father that homage and reſpect, which is infinitely more juſtly due from me to Him, than any honor can be due from this child to me! And let this reflection lead you to amend your conduct towards God, as you expect your child ſhould correct what is amiſs in his behavior to you.—Oh! ſhould our children behave towards us, as we do towards the glorious God, how ſhould we reſent and puniſh their ingratitude and diſobedience!—How juſtly doth He ſay of himſelf, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, ſaith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." ¶

Are there any who object their inability to keep up family worſhip?—How can you know you have not ability, if you have never made the trial? Perhaps, if you ſhould engage in the duty with ſeriouſneſs, you would find your tongue like the pen of a ready writer. Or if you ſhould not expreſs yourſelf with ſo much exactneſs and propriety as ſome others do, God requires according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which he hath not, and accepts our prayers, not according to the elegance of the expreſſion, but according to the ſincerity of heart with which they are offered.

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¶ Iſaiah 55. 8, 9.

And they who attend on your devotions muſt be very bad indeed, if inſtead of uniting with you, they ſpend the time in critically obſerving the diction or language, in order to make their profane remarks afterwards. Such as theſe will be like to banter every expreſſion of religion, and you muſt either baniſh them your families, or treat them with the neglect and contempt they deſerve while they are there.

They who complain of their want of ability for family worſhip ſhould endeavor to attain ſome better acquaintance with religion, to know more of God and of themſelves; they ſhould contemplate their mercies, conſider their dangers, and think of their wants—Such meditations would ſoon ſupply them with proper matter for prayer, and when the heart indites matter, words will ſeldom be wanting. "Every one can tell, how eloquent neceſſity is wont to make beggars, that are pinched with want and hunger; they do not uſe to want words to repreſent their caſe." Let me eſpecially recommend to ſuch heads of families a conſtant ſerious peruſal of the holy ſcriptures; theſe are not only able to make them wiſe to ſalvation, but they are peculiarly adapted to help them in their devotions; they will furniſh their minds with ſutable ſentiments, and their mouths with words proper for almoſt every occaſion.—If you cannot prevail with yourſelves to perform this duty in any other way, it

is better to pray in the uſe of ſome plain familiar forms than not to pray at all. At leaſt, you may uſe theſe, till by practice, and a more thorough acquaintance with religion, you have gained courage to pray without them; and then it ſeems more eligible to diſmiſs them. Poſſibly, I may be influenced by cuſtom and the prejudices of education; but it appears to me, that the ſtated uſe of forms, eſpecially in our more private exerciſes of religion, hath a tendency to damp our devotion, and leads to formality. They may not always have this effect, and I doubt not but many good chriſtians, who chuſe to make their addreſſes to God in this way, have the true ſpirit of prayer. We ought to bear with one another in our different ſentiments on ſuch circumſtantial points; and to love and eſteem thoſe, who ſerve God ſincerely, though their way of worſhip differ from our own.

Heads of families ſhould take particular care, that all in their houſes do, as far as may be, attend on theſe ſocial exerciſes of religion; and to order the other affairs of the family ſo as that the meaneſt ſervant may not be excluded. How ill doth it look, when a family is called together to worſhip God, to find one half of it diſperſed, and engaged in other buſineſs, as if they had no part nor lot in this matter!

I ſhall not pretend to dictate how much time is to be allotted for family devotion. Wiſdom is profitable

ſtable to direct in this, as in many other caſes. There are two extremes which ſhould carefully be avoided. The one is, when we hurry over the exerciſe in an indecent irreverent manner, as if we attended it only for form's ſake, and wanted to have it at an end. The other extreme is, when we run out to a tedious length, as if we expected to be heard for our much ſpeaking. "I reckon," to uſe the words of the judicious Mr. Howe, "that one quarter of an hour or leſs, ſpent with ſpirit and life, is a great deal better than hours together ſpent in nauſeous flatting repetitions; (which was the phariſaical way) in ſuch a tedious fulſome way, as tends to make religion a burthen and grievance. I think that is applicable to the purpoſes of religion, which hath been applied to meaner, much meaner purpoſes; that it is good to come from a meal with an appetite; that it is good to come ſo too from an exerciſe of religion, with thoſe pleaſant reliſhes left upon one's ſpirit, as may make him long for the return of ſuch a ſeaſon.

It is highly proper, when the family comes together for morning and evening devotions, to read ſome portion of God's holy word. This may be greater or leſs as ſuits our other affairs. By this practice, we put an honor on the ſcriptures—we may hope for great ſpiritual advantage—and we may be ſure that all under our charge will get an acquaintance with the ſacred oracles, although

there

there may be ſome who wholly neglect them at other times. The ſtrict charge which God gave the Jews remains on record for our inſtruction; "Thou ſhalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and ſhalt talk of them when thou ſitteſt in thine houſe, and when thou walkeſt by the way, and when thou lieſt down, and when thou riſeſt up." †

I have now delivered my thoughts concerning the nature and importance of family religion. I make no apology for my freedom and plainneſs, becauſe I have not ſaid any thing that I did not think myſelf obliged to ſay.

Let me once more beſeech you, oh! prayerleſs heads of families, to conſider what hath been ſaid. Think what account you ſhall be able to give to the great God—Think what is likely to become of your children's ſouls, while you ſet them ſuch an awful example of irreligion—While you live without prayer, you live the life of an heathen; yea, you are worſe, in this reſpect, than ſome even among the heathen—You bring diſcredit on the religion of the bleſſed Jeſus—You are injurious to the community of which you are members. While you ſhould be deprecating the judgments of heaven, you rather help to bring them down. No longer caſt off fear, nor reſtrain prayer before God. Begin this evening. The ſabbath is a good ſeaſon to enter upon this duty; when, it is to be hoped, ſome ſerious impreſſions are made on your minds by the exerciſes of the day. This alſo is a time

† Deut. 6. 7.

when

when you are likely to meet with the leaſt interruption. The ſerious conſciencious performance of this duty will afford you a ſatisfaction you cannot enjoy while you neglect it. And who can tell what bleſſings you may prevail with a prayer-hearing God to beſtow—on yourſelves—on your families—on the land ?

I ſhall conclude with ſome paſſages of an eminent author, only adapting them to ourſelves and the preſent ſtate of this community. "Do not you deſire that the world ſhould mend ? that you may ſee better times ; and to ſee your country flouriſh ? If trade languiſh, every one is ſenſible. If your civil rights are in danger, there is a general alarm—Methinks we ſhould not be inſenſible, if religion languiſh, if the power and ſpirit of the goſpel are loſt. But how ſhall religion live, if not in families ? There is the great failure—and any place, that hath long been the ſeat of religion, when it comes to decay in that reſpect, will decay in other reſpects too. "Be inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul depart from thee ; leſt I make thee deſolate, a land not inhabited." If that, which is the very ſoul of any people's good eſtate, even of the political body ; if that retire, all moulders. How deſirable a thing is it to ſee New-England in a proſperous flouriſhing condition ! But never expect to ſee it ſo, if religion ſhall be in a languiſhing decaying condition, gradually from day to day. This will be a dreadful foretoken. The cry of wickedneſs is loud among us : If the cry of prayer ſhall prevail and be louder,

this will draw down bleſſings. The cry of wickedneſs is calling for wrath and vengeance, for the vials to be poured out upon us; but if ſo many houſes as there are in this town, in this land, wherein religion is profeſſed, ſhould really become ſo many oratories, houſes of prayer, it is to be hoped there will be ſo many louder cries aſcending up into heaven for mercy. If there had been fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, nay ten righteous perſons in Sodom, that would have prevailed for mercy for that city. If ſo many as profeſs religion in New-England would but practiſe it, and family religion in particular, in this reſpect *vox populi* will be *vox Dei*, the voice of a praying people will be as the voice of God bleſſing us from above; and telling us that you have prevailed, the courſe of wrath is ſtopped, the decree reverſed, you ſhall ſee "the city of your ſolemnities a quiet habitation." This is ſaid by the prophet in a way of anſwer to the people who were brought in † praying, "O Lord, be gracious unto us, we have waited for thee; be thou their arm every morning, our ſalvation alſo in the time of trouble." Here was daily prayer aſcending and going up. It follows, § "Look upon Zion the city of our ſolemnities, thine eyes ſhall ſee Jeruſalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that ſhall not be taken down, not one of the ſtakes thereof ſhall ever be removed, neither ſhall any of the cords thereof be broken." AMEN!

† Iſa. 33. 2. § Verſe 20.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

The Uſefulneſs and Importance of Religious Education.

GENESIS XVIII. 19.

For I know him, that he will command his children and his houſhold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord, to do juſtice and judgment.

ABRAHAM was a very eminent perſonage. He was diſtinguiſhed by his ſituation and circumſtances in life; but he diſtinguiſhed himſelf more by his virtues. He had the ſignal honor of being called the friend of God. He ſat a bright example of faith and obedience in many trying inſtances. But, at this time, when God was about to treat him with an uncommon degree of intimacy and condeſcenſion, the reaſon He is pleaſed to give is—

is—" I know him, that he will command his children and his houſhold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord." You ſee how acceptable Abraham's pious care to tranſmit true religion to future generations was to God. It ſhows the very great Importance of parental endeavors to form children to virtue and holineſs. God, as it were, ſingles this out among thoſe virtues, which conſtituted the character of this illuſtrious Patriarch. Them that honor him, he will honor.

Theſe words are a proper foundation to diſcourſe of the duty of religious houſholders, to inſtruct thoſe under their care in the principles of religion and virtue; or, in the words of our text, to "command" their "children and houſhold to keep the way of the Lord."

In the firſt place, I ſhall ſhew what we are to underſtand by keeping the way of the Lord.

Secondly, In what ſenſe parents and heads of families are to command their children and houſhold to keep the way of the Lord.

Thirdly, I ſhall endeavor to prove, that this is the character of every religious houſholder, which will lead me to ſpeak of the importance of the duty, and how peculiarly acceptable it is to God.

Firſt, I am to ſhew what we are to underſtand by keeping the way of the Lord; it is added in the

the text, "to do juſtice and judgment." The phraſe includes univerſal moral rectitude, or the whole of that duty which creatures owe to God their Creator and Lord. This duty is, in ſome reſpects, different, under different diſpenſations. The foundation of moral virtue is always the ſame, the nature and perfections of God. But ſome particular circumſtances in religion, have been ſubject to alteration. For wiſe and good reaſons, God hath required, that men ſhould expreſs their regard to him, at one time, by rites and ceremonies, which have not been neceſſary at another. Religion hath been the ſame, but ſome appendages of religion have varied. As it is not my deſign critically to explain the text, but only to improve the example of Abraham for the quickening and encouragement of Chriſtian Parents, I ſhall not enquire into the ſtate of religion under the Abrahamic diſpenſation, but ſhall confine myſelf to what we are taught under the much clearer light of the goſpel.

The New-Teſtament plainly teaches us, that we muſt be ſaved in the way of faith, and in the way of holineſs. This is the "way of the Lord"—the way which is pleaſing to Him—the way which he obliges us to walk in—and with which He hath been pleaſed to connect eternal life. We are to believe the record which God hath given of his Son, and to yield him that tribute of homage, re-

verence, truſt, and obedience, which are juſtly due to his perſon and character. We are to ſubmit to his inſtructions—rely on his merits—and obey his commands. This is our duty. So far as we practiſe our duty, we "keep the way of the Lord." We do not walk in his way, when we reject his truths, or neglect the duties of our holy religion. However contemptuouſly ſome men ſpeak of faith, yet the goſpel lays great ſtreſs upon it, a belief of the truth is a fundamental principle in religion, and is neceſſary in order to juſtification and life. "He that believeth," ſaith our Saviour, "ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not ſhall be damned." On the other hand, in whatever high terms the goſpel ſpeaks of faith; it always ſuppoſes, that it is a vital operative principle, that it purifieth the heart, and is productive of univerſal holineſs. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

To "*keep* the way of the Lord" intends continuance, or perſeverance in duty. It is not enough, that we believe the teſtimony of God concerning Jeſus Chriſt, at this or that particular time; it muſt be a continued exerciſe, a prevailing habit. A chriſtian is not perfect in this life; he daily ſins, and contracts new guilt; he can obtain pardon and comfort only by the view of a crucified Saviour, and an hearty acquieſcence in the goſpel ſcheme of ſalvation. This is the fountain ſet open for ſin and for uncleanneſs. This is what alone can pacify the

conſcience

conſcience of a ſinner. Therefore chriſtians are ſaid to "live by the faith of the Son of God." Faith may be increaſed, it may grow ſtronger and ſtronger. It is by exerciſe that this and every other gracious habit is increaſed or ſtrengthened. The moſt ſublime acts of virtue will not prove that we are in the way to eternal life, unleſs, by patient continuance in the ways of well-doing, we ſeek for glory, honor, and immortality. He that endureth to the end ſhall be ſaved. Whatever change we may think we have experienced at any particular time, if the temper of our minds and the courſe of our lives be not correſpondent, we know nothing of religion, and our truſt is that of the hypocrite, which is "a ſpider's web," and will diſappoint us when we have moſt need of ſupport.

I am, ſecondly, to conſider, in what ſenſe parents and heads of families are to "command" their "children and houſhold to keep the way of the Lord." Mankind do not naturally walk in the right way. There is too often ſeen in early life a propenſity to ſin. It diſcovers a ſtrange unacquaintedneſs with human nature, to ſuppoſe that it is as much inclined to virtue as to vice. All the pains we can take are but juſt ſufficient, they are often inſufficient, to reſtrain the paſſions and appetites of thoſe who are under our care, and to keep them from forbidden paths.——What would become of children?——What would become of families?——What would become of the world? if every one was left to walk after the incli-

nations of his own heart, without any check or reſtraint. This earth would probably become a ſcene of diſorder and wickedneſs; men would abuſe and devour one another; and a virtuous character would ſcarcely be found. The God of nature hath therefore conſtituted a kind of natural ſubordination; hath entruſted one to the care of another; and hath particularly fixed the relation of parents and children. Parents, from the natural affection which they have for their children, deſire to keep them from things that would be prejudicial, take upon them to guide their early ſteps, and to point out the way in which they ſhould go. This is the plan of Providence: and agreably to this plan, parents ſhould endeavor to form the minds of their children to a love of virtue and goodneſs, and to preſerve them in their tender years from thoſe practices, which will make them the bane of ſociety in this world, and expoſe them to the curſe of God in the other.

There is certainly a diſtinction between right and wrong, virtue and vice. But how ſhall children find out this difference? We muſt not expect theywill be taught it by immediate inſpiration: and if we leave them to the exerciſe of their own reaſon, and to that only; is there not room to fear, that before this is mature enough to guide them, if that ſhould ever be the caſe, they will have contracted ſuch habits of vice, as reaſon will never be able to eradicate

eradicate? Parents ought therefore to take them by the hand, and lead them in the way everlasting. God and nature have made this their duty. They are to "command" their children and household to keep the way of the Lord.—Parents are rulers in their own houses. They have authority over those whom Providence hath committed to their charge. They may not enjoin any thing unreasonable; but they may enjoin the commands of God, because they are founded in the highest reason. They may forbid—they ought, as far as in them lies, to prevent whatever is contrary to the divine law. They have a right to insist on the attention of their children, while they set before them the necessity and reasonableness of a submission to God, their Maker and Lord. They ought to watch for the dawnings of reason, and to instruct them in the great truths and duties of our holy religion, as they are able to bear them. They should endeavor to impress on their minds a sense of the being and perfections of God, of his universal presence, and moral government. They should teach them the difference between good and evil, and strive to beget in them, while they are yet young and tender, an abhorrence of sin, and a love of virtue and holiness. They should labor to awaken conscience, and to keep it active and vigilant. They should observe their faults, correct their mistakes, and warn them of their danger. They should open to them the doctrine of a Mediator; set before them, in the most

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engaging light, the aſtoniſhing love of Jeſus Chriſt, in taking our nature, to inſtruct and reform a vicious world, and to lay down his life a ſacrifice, that he might reconcile us to God. They ſhould teach them, that God will pardon the offences they commit, only on account of the merits of this glorious Redeemer, the reaſon they have to hope in the mercy of God through Chriſt, and the mighty encouragement there is to the practice of virtue, from the gracious declarations of the word. They ſhould endeavor to alarm their fears by the awful threatnings denounced againſt the impenitent and unbelieving, to melt their hearts into gratitude and love by the goodneſs of God, and to quicken their obedience by the glorious proſpects which the goſpel preſents. They ſhould make them ſenſible of their moral weakneſs and inſufficiency to that which is good; this they may be early taught to obſerve, from their love of vanity, the tranſitory effects of their good reſolutions, and their frequent violations of their moſt ſolemn vows and promiſes. They ſhould ſoon make them acquainted with the treachery of their own hearts; and warn them of the ſnares and temptations with which they are continually ſurrounded. From all theſe conſiderations, they ſhould be led up to God as the ſource of all good; they ſhould be taught the neceſſity of divine influence, and the importance of maintaining a conſtant intercourſe with the Deity, by frequent acts of devotion. Theſe are ſome of the truths and duties we

are to inculcate on our children. We ſhall doubtleſs often find great backwardneſs and oppoſition in them; and ſhall have frequent occaſion to mourn the little effect of our inſtructions and endeavors; but we may not give way to diſcouragement; We ſhould follow them with continual counſels; We ſhould vary our methods of application; and uſe every juſt art of addreſs, till we win them to God.

If the truths of religion were ſubjects of doubtful diſputation; if the practice of virtue was a thing quite indifferent; we might leave children to themſelves, and permit them to chuſe this way or that, without taking any pains to influence their choice. But as this is a matter of the laſt conſequence, as they will probably meet with innumerable allurements and temptations, and are in danger of being ſeduced by reaſon of their unacquaintedneſs with the world, the men and the things of it, we may well be allowed to improve all the means with which God hath furniſhed us, to preſerve them.

It would be wrong and unjuſtifiable to uſe any deceitful arts, or to fill the minds of children with imaginary terrors. And what need can there be of our taking any ſuch method? We need no arguments beſides thoſe which reaſon and religion afford us. Theſe, and theſe only, we are to improve: Theſe we are to ſet before them in the ſtrongeſt light, and to preſs with unceaſing perſeverance.

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But how ineffectual are our endeavors like to prove, if we do not exemplify the duties we inculcate! Children, as we have had occaſion to mention in the preceding diſcourſe, ſoon learn to obſerve their parents: They are apt, while they are young, if not afterwards, to form a high opinion of them, and are fond of treading in their ſteps. And if they ſee us careleſs in our walk, looſe and vain in our converſation; if we are paſſionate, quarrelſome, intemperate, evil-ſpeakers, profane; or are given to pleaſure and diſſipation; if we neglect God, mis-ſpend the ſabbath, or are indifferent in our attendance on public inſtitutions, in vain ſhall we enjoin on them the duties of religion and virtue. They will not think themſelves obliged to obſerve thoſe precepts, to which we pay no regard ourſelves. They will look on our inſtructions as only matter of form, and of little importance, or that a very ſmall degree of goodneſs is all that is neceſſary. It is an old maxim, but which contains a great deal of truth and juſtice, "The greateſt reverence is due to children." They are ſo apt to form themſelves by us, that we cannot be too cautious of our behaviour before them. They are ready to think that which is lawful for their inſtructors, is lawful for them, and to excuſe themſelves if they come a little ſhort. If, therefore, a parent deſires his children ſhould aim at an exalted degree of piety, he ſhould be an example of it himſelf; he ſhould behave with the utmoſt circumſpection and care,

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and be ſure never to practiſe himſelf what he condemns in them. In this way of inſtruction and example, a parent may do much to gain his children to virtue and a ſober converſation. But ſomething more is neceſſary. It is not enough that children are civil and moral in their deportment. This is good—it will prevent the uneaſineſs which a contrary behaviour would occaſion—it will make them uſeful in the world. But, in order to their being happy in a future ſtate, they muſt have an inward principle of holineſs, a ſupreme love of God reigning in their hearts, and be governed by the peculiar motives of the goſpel of Chriſt. You cannot but be ſenſible your power doth not reach ſo far—You cannot give your children a ſpiritual diſcernment of divine truths—You cannot captivate their hearts to the love of holineſs—You cannot produce true repentance—You cannot, though you exhauſt every topic of perſuaſion, compel them to devote themſelves to God, and to maintain a conſtant regard to Him in their moral conduct. They may chuſe, from reſpect for you, to avoid thoſe things that would grieve and offend you, and to behave as they think will pleaſe you; but you cannot make them ſincere chriſtians—You cannot produce right principles—or bring them to act from thoſe exalted motives which chriſtianity propoſes.——This is the work of God. He hath the moſt intimate acceſs to our minds, and is able to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleaſure. By the in-

ternal operation of his Spirit, he gives ſuch a view of divine truth, as changes the heart, produces right diſpoſitions, and leads to an anſwerable practice. He impreſſes ſuch a ſenſe of the reality and importance of religion, that Satan tries his arts in vain, the ſoul is fixed on God, and a conformity to this All-perfect Being is the height of its deſire. This is a ſtate of mind human nature is capable of. It is not an exalted pitch of virtue, which we may only view at a diſtance, and wiſh we could attain; it is what the goſpel encourages us to aim at. Chriſt hath purchaſed the Spirit, we are directed to aſk this great and comprehenſive bleſſing, and are allowed to expect the beſtowment of it. Our Heavenly Father is infinitely more ready to give the Holy Spirit to them that aſk him, than the moſt affectionate parents on earth are, to give good things to their children. Parents therefore, beſides all other means, ought to be frequent and earneſt in their prayers to the God of all grace, that he would give their children a juſt concern for themſelves, renew and ſanctify the powers and faculties of their ſouls, and keep them in the love of God. They ſhould, at the ſame time, endeavor to give their children ſuch a rational conviction of the truths of religion, in their nature and importance, as will influence them to pray for themſelves. They ſhould ſet before them the condeſcending notice God takes of early piety, and the gracious promi-

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ſes he hath made to it, "I love them that love me, and they that ſeek me early ſhall find me." §

I proceed in the third place, to evidence the importance of the duty we have been explaining, how right it is in itſelf, and how peculiarly acceptable to God.

Firſt, Hereby the glory of God is advanced. Every one reduced from the paths of ſin is a new ſubject gained to Chriſt—The greater the number of thoſe who are recovered to him, the leſs ſin is committed, and the more good is done in the world—The leſs there is of ſin, ſo much the leſs is God diſhonored—The more there is of virtue, ſo much the more is God glorified. This cannot but be a powerful motive with one who hath ſincere love to God, to exert himſelf to do good to all within his ſphere; eſpecially, to ſuch as are moſt intimately connected with him, as with theſe he hath the greateſt proſpect of ſucceſs.

Again, This is the beſt way of teſtifying our regard to our children. Religion was not deſigned to extirpate our natural affections: It tends to confirm thoſe ſocial ties, which are ſo neceſſary to the peace and good order of the world. But religion teaches us to turn our affections into the right channel, or to expreſs our love in a right manner. Love naturally leads us to conſult the intereſt of the

§ Prov. 8. 17.

the object beloved; and we ſhall always look on that to be the intereſt of our children, which we value and chuſe for ourſelves. If we are earthly-minded, we ſhall be ſollicitous that they may be rich and great. If we have choſen God for our portion, we ſhall endeavor that they may make the ſame happy choice. A good man cannot, without the utmoſt diſtreſs, ſee his children, whom he loves as his own ſoul, immerſed in ſin, abandoned to vice, and going in the broad road to deſtruction. The thought, that they are the enemies of God, will be like a dart piercing through his heart. It will be an allay of the joy he feels from the proſpect of being ever with the Lord, that theſe dear parts of himſelf will be excluded this bleſſedneſs, and muſt dwell in blackneſs of darkneſs for-ever. This conſideration will give fervor to his prayers, and quicken his endeavors, that he may ſave their ſouls from death.

Once more, a concern for his own ſoul ought to influence every parent to do what he can, that his children may "keep the way of the Lord." They were given to him by God, the great Lord of all; they were committed to his care, that he might bring them up for God. This is an important part of our duty; and if we neglect their ſouls, we ſo far neglect our own. They will be in danger of periſhing, but their blood God will require at our hands. This neglect will ſcatter darkneſs in our

paths,

paths, and make a death-bed uncomfortable. Whereas, by inculcating the truths and motives of religion upon our children; we ſhall, probably, feel the weight of them on our own minds, and ſhall imperceptibly make advances in the chriſtian temper; and there is reaſon to hope, that if we diſcharge our duty with fidelity, God will ſucceed our endeavors; and we ſhall have the unſpeakable joy to ſee "our children walking in the truth."

It is obſervable, that God not only ſays of Abraham, "he will command his children and houſhold after him;" but adds, "and they *ſhall* keep the way of the Lord," as if this was the certain effect: He will faithfully inſtruct them, and they will learn and practiſe what he teacheth. So we read in Proverbs, "Train up a child in the way he ſhould go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." † Such expreſſions, though not to be taken in a ſtrict and abſolute ſenſe, are yet a great encouragement to a religious education. But if, after all, our children ſhould prove refractory, diſſolute, and vicious; as, alas! the caſe may be, we ſhall be clear of guilt, God will accept our faithful, though unſucceſsful, endeavors; He "is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have ſhewed towards his name." He ſpeaks with peculiar approbation of Abraham's pious care of his houſhold, and makes it a reaſon for

† Prov. 22. 6.

for revealing his purpoſe concerning Sodom. It is pleaſing to God, when his ſervants manifeſt a regard to him, and are careful of every part of their duty. It is pleaſing to him, when parents bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as this puts their children in the way of a bleſſing, which they will not miſs of, if they be not wanting to themſelves. God delighteth not in the death of ſinners, but had rather they ſhould turn and live. He would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowlege of the truth; and therefore he is pleaſed with every thing that tends to promote their ſalvation.

On the whole, If children are neglected, they are in danger of being diſſolute and vicious—If this is their juſt character, they will be the diſgrace of their parents, the bane of ſociety, and the objects of the divine diſpleaſure in a future world—If parents exert themſelves to promote their beſt good, they may humbly hope, their children will be a comfort to them, a bleſſing to the world, and forever happy after this life; or, if they are incorrigible, their blood will be on their own heads.

And what poſſible objection can be made, to our treating our children as reaſonable creatures?—to our endeavoring to make them feel that they are ſo?—and perſuading them to think and act rationally

ly? Is it not right and fit to make them acquainted with truth, and to conduct them in the way that leads to life and glory? How incongruous is it to all the principles of reaſon, as well as religion, for parents to be anxious and diſtreſſed about the temporal intereſt of their children, and thoughtleſs about their eternal welfare? How careful are moſt parents to get their children inſtructed in ſome uſeful art and buſineſs, that they may be able to live in the world! They caution them, when they ſee any danger of their making a miſtake—They adviſe and aſſiſt them—They inculcate care, induſtry, and frugality—They give them line upon line, precept upon precept, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. And ought they not to have a greater concern for their ſouls, which are of infinitely more value than their bodies, and which are in continual danger of being loſt—ruined forever?

IMPROVEMENT.

Firſt, What hath been ſaid may well lead parents to the moſt humbling and ſerious reflections. Alas! are there not many who ſtand in this relation that have no concern for their own ſouls? Such as theſe cannot be expected to have much concern for the ſpiritual welfare of their children. They cannot guide others in a way which they are unacquainted with themſelves. If they attempt to admoniſh and inſtruct their children, how juſtly

may

may their own hearts upbraid them ? How pungently will their conſciences, if they are not quite callous, expoſtulate ? " Thou that teacheſt another, teacheſt thou not thyſelf ?" When they reprove their children for not attending to the things that belong to their peace ; how muſt their own hearts reproach them—" Thou art the man"—Thou art guilty of that very thing which thou condemneſt in them ! How can parents exhort their children to pray, when they never make their addreſſes at the throne of grace themſelves ! How can they inculcate ſobriety and virtue, when they are ſenſual and wicked themſelves ! Their children will be ready to deſpiſe their inſtructions and to ſet at nought their counſels, however good in themſelves : It will be well, if they do not contract a prejudice againſt religion itſelf, and think it all a deluſion—a mere farce, when they find their teachers and inſtructors live in direct contradiction to their own precepts. Such evil examples, eſpecially in parents, do more hurt, than all their counſels can poſſibly do good. They tend awfully to harden the minds of young perſons, and to embolden them in thoſe evil practices, which tend to perdition. And ſo far as you, who are parents, lead your children into the paths of vice, you will have the accumulated guilt of their ſins to anſwer for at the bar of God. What additional horror will ſeize you, to ſee your ſons—your daughters—at the left hand of their Judge, and to hear them accuſing you

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in that awful day; I was committed to this father —to this mother—They were appointed by God and nature to be the inſtructors of my childhood—They ought to have taught me the truths and duties of religion—But they neglected this important charge—They never prayed with me, nor taught me to pray—They did not counſel, warn, nor reprove me—I never heard from them what God expected from me, nor was urged to flee the wrath to come—They did not bring me to an acquaintance with the holy ſcriptures, which might have made me wiſe to ſalvation—They did not teach me to reverence ſabbaths, nor to prize the inſtitutions of religion——On the contrary, I ſaw them careleſs and vain, ſenſual and worldly, and I only followed the example they ſat me—and by their means am now involved in endleſs, remedileſs ruin. —Curſed be the father that begat me! and the mother that gave me ſuck!—With what anguiſh will you hear ſuch dreadful accuſations! and how terrible the tho't of having thoſe your companions in the place of torment, and of being inſtrumental of bringing them there, whom you were under peculiar obligations to lead in the ways of truth and holineſs! Oh! be awakened, ye guilty parents, reflect with deep contrition on your paſt neglects, and amend your ways and doings before it be too late, that neither you, nor your children may come into condemnation.

But, I fear, the charge doth not terminate here. Thoſe parents, who have been wholly forgetful of

God, are not the only ones, who have reason to remember their faults with respect to the education of their children. Many, who have some sense of religion may find much in themselves to blame. Alas! have we, any of us, done our duty?—We have been careful, that our children might make a good external appearance; but have we been as sollicitous, that they might be adorned with the graces of the Spirit? —We have been anxious that they might live agreably in this world; but have we had equal anxiety that they might live for-ever in a better?—We have been distressed when they have met with difficulties, losses, and disappointments; but have we been as uneasy when we have seen them indifferent about religion, immersed in sin, and in danger of losing their immortal souls? And yet, we are convinced that the soul is of more worth than the body, and that eternity is of infinitely greater importance, than the short, the fleeting time of our continuance here.—We are persuaded of these great truths, we venture our all upon them; but we are too closely attached to this world; we are too sensibly affected with earthly things; we do not look at those eternal things, which are not seen, as we ought, and as we desire.—We complain of the badness of the times—of the degeneracy of the age—of the prevalence of vice and irreligion—and in particular, of the vanity and dissoluteness of our youth—and God knows, we do not complain without reason. But is not much of the levity and wickedness, we see in our children and young people,

ple, owing to ourſelves? Have not they learned to think lightly of ſacred things; becauſe they have ſeen us careleſs in our attendance on the duties of religion, or becauſe we have not more warmly preſſed theſe duties on them? It cannot be ſuppoſed that a parent, who hath any, the leaſt degree of goodneſs, can wholly neglect thoſe under his care; but might we not have done more—much more, than we have done?—Surely we might. If we are heirs of the promiſes, how much reaſon have we for ſhame and remorſe, in the reflection that when our Heavenly Father hath done ſo much for us, we have done ſo little for Him! that we have diſcovered ſo little affection for thoſe who came out of our own bowels! that we have not been more induſtrious in our endeavors to promote their everlaſting welfare!

The next head of Improvement is, to awaken parents to a ſenſe of their duty, and to perſuade them to attend it with the greateſt diligence and care. "They ſhould command their children and ſervants to keep the way of the Lord."—It becomes you, in the firſt place, to walk in this way yourſelves. If you have a juſt concern for your own ſouls, you cannot be indifferent about the ſouls of your children. To neglect them is to endanger yourſelves.—Conſider, with ſerioufneſs and attention, your obligations to teach your children the truths and duties of our holy religion—You owe this to God—You owe it to them—The time is ſhort—

ſhort—quickly—very quickly—your opportunities to inſtruct and counſel your children will be at an end.—Perhaps they may be taken from you by death ; and how amazingly diſtreſſing will be the parting, if you have reaſon to apprehend they have no acquaintance with God and divine things ; and that this fatal ignorance is owing to your neglect ! —If they are not taken from you, you muſt ſoon leave them, you muſt leave them in an enſnaring world, ſurrounded with temptations and dangers. Improve the time you have with them, to inſtruct them, and to lead them in the way in which they ſhould go : Do what in you lies, to form their minds to religion and virtue, and to prepare them for a bleſſed immortality. With what comfort will you leave the world, if you have reaſon to think, that you leave thoſe behind you, and who have proceeded from you, who will do more for God than you have done ! What delight and ſatisfaction may you have in the thought, that, though you are to be ſeparated for a time, you ſhall again meet, never to be ſeparated, but to rejoice together through eternal ages !—You may carry your tho'ts ſtill further—What ineffable joy will it afford you, to ſee your children at the right hand of Chriſt ; and to hear that glorious, but condeſcending Savior, approving your care of them, accepting your endeavors to promote their good, and publicly declaring that all the happineſs they now enjoy, all the glory they expect, is, under God, owing to your

your piety, fidelity, and diligence ! How will it add to the felicity of that happy day, to hear your children, now perfected ſpirits, bleſſing and praiſing God, that they were born of parents, who devoted them to God, and followed them with their inſtructions and prayers ; and bearing teſtimony, before the aſſembled univerſe, to your faithful diſcharge of the truſt repoſed in you by the great Lord of all ! It will be an addition to your own bleſſedneſs, to find that you have been happily inſtrumental of increaſing the number of Chriſt's diſciples, of the heirs of glory ; and that not only you, but your children are to be admitted to the inconceivable joys of heaven. With what ecſtatic delight will the glorified parents celebrate that infinite love, which hath diſtinguiſhed them and theirs from the unbelieving world—from thoſe unhappy wretches, who ſtand trembling at the bar of Jeſus Chriſt, waiting to hear their doom ! With what holy gratitude will they cry out, Lord,here are we, and the children thou haſt graciouſly given us ;—given us, not merely to be a tranſitory comfort in the world we have paſſed through ; but to be an addition to our joy through eternity !

Oh parents ! How ought ſuch thoughts to rouſe your ſouls, and animate you to the moſt vigorous and conſtant endeavors, to bring your children to the love and fear of God !—Lead them betimes to God—never reſt, till you have reaſon to hope they are believers in Chriſt, and heirs of the kingdom—

Pray

Pray for them, and learn them to pray for themſelves—Counſel them to begin with God, and to dedicate the morning of life to his ſervice—Reſtrain them from bad company, and bad practices—Teach them to deny all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in the world—Enjoin upon them a ſacred regard to the Lord's-day.———

While our Rulers are taking laudable pains, to prevent the open profanation of this holy day ; ¶ or rather to prevent *their* being diſturbed who would gladly keep it holy ; while they, who are appointed to ſee our laws duly executed, are endeavoring, at the expence of their eaſe and comfort, to diſcharge their truſt ; methinks every religious houſholder ought to ſecond their endeavors, or rather go before them, and prevent all occaſion of their exerciſing authority upon him, or upon thoſe that belong to him. Moſt of the diſorders on our ſabbaths might be prevented, if heads of families would keep at home themſelves, and reſtrain thoſe who are under their care, from going abroad. If they have no ſcruples themſelves, yet tenderneſs to us who have, and who think we ought to keep one day in ſeven holy to the Lord, ſhould prevent their doing any thing to diſturb and offend us. Although an external obſervation of the ſabbath doth not prove that we are ſincere chriſtians, yet an open contempt of it gives a good deal of reaſon to fear we are not.

But

¶ This ſermon was preached, by particular deſire, the Lord's-day after a new election of wardens.

But to return.———Often remind your children of a future ſtate—Admoniſh them of death, judgment and eternity—Charge them, in the name of God, to give diligent heed that they may be found of their Judge in peace. To all your counſels and endeavors be careful to add your own good example. Let them ſee by you, that religion is practicable, is amiable, and that you require no more of them, than you are willing to ſubmit to yourſelves. Let them ſee, that you eſteem the ſervice of God no unreaſonable reſtraint, but rather a privilege; that you attend duty with delight and from choice; that you ſerve God with both a perfect heart and a willing mind.

While you take care of your children, do not forget the reſt of your houſhold. "I know him," as it is ſaid in the text, "that he will command his children and houſhold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord." Maſters of families ſhould inſpect the manners of all in their houſes, and inculcate upon them the nature and importance of religion. The meaneſt ſervants have ſouls, and are probationers for immortality. This conſideration ought to come with peculiar force on thoſe, who think they have a right to keep their fellow-creatures—their brethren, in a ſtate of perpetual ſlavery. One argument, often uſed in favor of this practice, is, that theſe perſons are, by means of this merchandize of ſlaves, brought to the light of the goſpel. To give this argument the leaſt appear-

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ance of weight, maſters muſt take pains to inſtruct them in the principles of religion, and to make them partakers of the glorious liberty of the ſons of God. Then *they* will have reaſon to rejoice in their otherwiſe unhappy lot. They will love and eſteem you, they will ſerve you with chearfulneſs and fidelity, and bleſs God for you to eternity. But, if you neglect their ſouls, there is danger of their becoming more the children of diſobedience than they were before; and their being brought into a chriſtian land will be their greateſt misfortune.

Thirdly, Let children be attentive to their parents, while they inſtruct and counſel them. Your piety and holy converſation will afford them the higheſt ſatisfaction: And when you conſider how much they have done for you, if you have any ingenuouſneſs of mind, or the leaſt ſpark of gratitude, you cannot but wiſh to afford them all the comfort in your power. But whatever pleaſure they have in you, or from you, your conformity to the nature and will of God will be of the greateſt advantage to yourſelves: Religion is a never-failing ſource of reſt in this world, and will be followed with unceaſing joy and glory in another.

Your pious parents are grieved, when they ſee you take to evil courſes; and can you have the heart to do any thing to trouble thoſe, to whom you are ſo obliged, and who think no pains too great to ſerve you! They are diſtreſſed to ſee you going in the paths of the deſtroyer, but your's will be the deſtruction,

deſtruction. You will feel the miſery, the very thought of which makes them to tremble. They tremble for you now, but if they are faithful to your ſouls, they will be above being affected with your infelicity hereafter. They will be glorious, though you be not gathered. They will have none of that uneaſineſs, which your faults and miſcarriages occaſion them, in the preſent imperfect ſtate. They will be ſwallowed up in God. His pleaſure will be their's—his choice their choice. They will have no affection to created beings, further than they diſcern in them a conformity to God, the ſupreme object of their love. They will ſee thoſe, who were once their neareſt relatives, doomed to perdition, without any uneaſy emotion—without a wiſh that it might be otherwiſe. They will acquieſce in their condemnation.—But as for you, all the advantages you have had in your education, all the light you have been favored with, will riſe up in judgment againſt you, and be ſo many circumſtances to aggravate your guilt. They will increaſe the horror of your own mind; and add to the fierceneſs of thoſe flames, that will never be extinguiſhed.

Laſtly, Are any of you ſo unhappy, as to be left in your early days, under the care of parents or maſters, who take no care of your beſt intereſt, who never inſtruct or pray with you; but, on the contrary, ſet an example, of levity, of profanneſs, of intemperance, of ſabbath-breaking, and a diſregard to religion; you have the more reaſon to watch o-

ver yourſelves, and to pray to God for his grace to preſerve you. You know you have ſouls of infinite worth—ſouls which are now upon their probation for eternity—You hear of Chriſt—You have the holy ſcriptures—You can find opportunities to attend the inſtitutions of religion—You have means ſufficient to leave you without excuſe, if you neglect God, and live in ſin. If you have not ſo many advantages as ſome others have, you ought to be the more diligent in improving the advantages you have. Your adherence to God, when you have ſo many temptations to forſake Him, will be peculiarly pleaſing to Him. He will remember all your trials, diſcouragements, and ſelf-denial. The favor of God is not confined to the children of his covenant ſervants; He is able even of ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham; there was ſome good thing toward the Lord God of Iſrael found in a ſon of Jeroboam, who made Iſrael to ſin; very unworthy parents have ſometimes been bleſſed with pious and virtuous children. As none will be admitted to the bleſſings of Chriſt's kingdom, becauſe they have had the honor to deſcend from religious parents; ſo none will be excluded, becauſe their parents were profane and wicked. Whatſoever good thing any man doth, the ſame ſhall he receive of the Lord. God is no reſpecter of perſons, but in every nation, and in every family, he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, ſhall be accepted of Him.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

The Table of the Lord rendered contemptible.

MALACHI I. 7.

Ye ſay the table of the Lord is contemptible.

THE altar and table of the Lord are uſed as words of the ſame import in ſeveral of the prophecies. We read in the prophetical deſcription of the temple, "The altar of wood was three cubits high, and the length thereof two cubits—and he ſaid unto me, This is the *Table* that is before the Lord." §

God expected from the Jews a ſacred regard to his inſtitutions; that they ſhould approach them with

§ Ezek. 41. 22.

with that purity and preparation which the law required, and attend them with that ſerioufneſs, decency, and humility, which became them, when in the preſence of the Divine Majeſty. "Ye ſhall keep my ſabbaths, and reverence my ſanctuary; I am the Lord." † A neglect here God eſteemed an affront offered to Him. To deſpiſe his ordinances was to deſpiſe Him. Accordingly, in our context, God declared himſelf highly diſpleaſed with their offerings, and pronounced an awful curſe on thoſe who preſented them. "A ſon honoreth his father, and a ſervant his maſter, if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a maſter, where is my fear? ſaith the Lord of hoſts unto you, O prieſts, that deſpiſe my name." Inſtead of pleading guilty to this charge, and correcting their faults, they are repreſented as ſtanding upon their juſtification, "And ye ſay, wherein have we deſpiſed thy name?" Notwithſtanding the inſolence of this reply, God condeſcended to enter into particulars, "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar." They enquire again, "Wherein have we polluted thee?" They either denied that they offered ſuch polluted things; or, that the imperfections of their ſervices any way affected the All-perfect Deity. He replies, "In that ye ſay the table of the Lord is contemptible." It is not likely they ventured to ſay this in expreſs words, but this was the language of their practice. They attended on the inſtitutions of religion with levity and indifference, ſo as to ſhew that they

† Levit. 19. 30.

they ſet no value on them; or, their general behaviour was profane and wicked, whereby they led others to deſpiſe ordinances, which had ſo little good effect on thoſe who pretended to obſerve them.

The ſpirit of our text reacheth to goſpel times. Although the particular rites and ſacrifices of the Moſaic diſpenſation are abrogated, yet God hath ſtill his ſacred inſtitutions, which are deſigned to keep up an intercourſe between the great God of heaven, and us his indigent dependent creatures; and are moſt wiſely adapted to make us more holy and ſpiritual. As they are appointed by the wiſe Governor of the univerſe, we ought to have the higheſt ſenſe of their importance—To attend upon them with the utmoſt reverence and reſpect—and to avoid every thing which would look as if we deſpiſed them ourſelves, or might lead others to deſpiſe them.

I might profitably diſcourſe on all the parts of inſtituted worſhip, and caution you to take heed how you obſerve them. But my deſign is to ſpeak particularly of that ordinance, to which the letter of our text naturally leads our thoughts.—Had the Lord a table under the Jewiſh Œconomy? He hath alſo a table under the Chriſtian diſpenſation. We read in one place, of "eating the Lord's ſupper," This is expreſſed in another place, by partaking of the Lord's table: Both phraſes refer to that ſacred entertainment, which Chriſt hath prepared,

pared, and by which we are to ſhew the Lord's death until he come. This entertainment is ſpiritiual, the bleſſings it was deſigned to convey are ſpiritual,& we ought to be ſpiritual in our attendance upon it. "God is a Spirit,and they that worſhipHim," ſhould "worſhip Him in ſpirit and in truth." Did the Jews ſay ; "the table of theLord is contemptible?" and is not this the language of chriſtians ? Is not this the language of our practice ? If an infidel was to obſerve the conduct of moſt among us with reſpect to the Lord's table, would he not ſuppoſe we diſpiſed the inſtitution,and thought it of no importance at all ?—The moſt wholly neglect it—Some ruſh careleſsly to it—Others attend upon it with a calm indifference—Too many take no care to behave agreably to the profeſſion which they make there. All theſe practically ſay, "The table of the Lord is contemptible." You would, perhaps, tremble at the thought of uſing ſuch profane language ; but if you ſay this by your behavior and conduct, ſurely you are not free from this impiety.—It may not be amiſs to ſet before you, in its proper colors, the contempt you caſt on this ordinance, that you may be awakened and led to repentance—And as my deſign is, by the bleſſing of God, to reach your conſciences, you will ſuffer me to ſpeak with all poſſible plainneſs.

Firſt, They ſay "that the table of the Lord is contemptible," who neglect to attend on the ſupper of the Lord. There is ſcarcely any thing plainer in the

the ſacred oracles, than the obligations chriſtians are under, to commemorate the love and grace of JeſusChriſt at his table. OurLord ſays,“ Do this in remembrance of me.” St. Paul ſays, “ Thus are ye to ſhew forth the Lord's death till he come ;” and yet,how few are there,comparatively,who obey this command, or attend this ſacred inſtitution ? It begins to be a rare thing to ſee any coming to the table of the Lord. They, who have been given up to God in baptiſm, neglect to devote themſelves to Him, when they come to years. Not only diſſolute and profane perſons turn their backs upon this ordinance ; but perſons of character, who make conſcience of their ways, and appear to have a ſerious ſenſe of religion on their minds. Parents, who ought, as their children grow up, and their rational powers expand, to take them by the hand and lead them in the ways of piety, ſet them an example, in this inſtance, of a criminal neglect. Our young people, as ſoon as they are capable of obſerving, ſee ſo many of a ſuperior character omitting this duty, that they naturally conclude it is a matter of indifference, whether they perform it or not. And they, who have lived long in the neglect of this ordinance, find ſo many as negligent as themſelves, that they feel neither ſhame nor remorſe ; they become eaſy, while they live in diſobedience to as plain a command as any in the Bible. I appeal to all preſent, whether this is not a true ſtate of things among us. The neglect of the

Lord's

Lord's ſupper is ſo general a thing, that I have no fear you will think I point out particular perſons; I rather fear, particular perſons will not think themſelves immediately concerned, where the charge is ſo general, and affects ſo many.

But, my brethren, is not this a matter which well deſerves your ſerious conſideration? Here is a plain command of Jeſus Chriſt, who hath the higheſt claim to your obedience—It is the command of Him, who hath loved you and given himſelf for you—It is his laſt, his dying command—and yet you diſregard and neglect it. Is not this to ſay, as plainly as the Jews did, "the table of the Lord is contemptible?" Can you caſt more viſible contempt upon this inſtitution, than by ſuch an habitual neglect? Is not this to declare to the world, that you think it of no importance, whether you obey Chriſt or not? that his inſtitutions may as well be omitted, and his ordinances rejected? and do not ſuch reflections in the end fall upon him who is the Author of them?—upon him whom God would have all men to honor even as they honor the Father?

Some make a great diſtinction between moral and poſitive duties. Moral duties, they tell us, are of everlaſting obligation; poſitive duties depend on the will of God. But is it not an everlaſting truth, that God is to be obeyed, whatever he requires

quires of his creatures? Is not the Lord's ſupper adapted to anſwer many moral purpoſes? While, therefore, we endeavor to ſhew all poſſible regard to every moral duty, we are not to deſpiſe thoſe which are called poſitive inſtitutions, as if they were of inferior obligation; or, as if the neglect of them were a matter of trifling concernment. We ought to venerate every divine appointment, tho' there is no apparent reaſon for it, but the will of God the ſovereign Lord of all. If mercy is ſometimes to be ſet before ſacrifice, ſacrifice is not therefore to be neglected, but to be obſerved with reverence and ſolemnity of mind.

It is an awful conſideration, that ſo many live in the habitual breach of a command of God. That the careleſs and profane ſhould turn their backs upon the holy euchariſt, is what we expect, yea, while they retain this character, it is what we deſire. But that you, who appear to have a regard to our bleſſed Saviour, and to make conſcience of your conduct in other inſtances;—that you, who appear to have a ſenſe of the worth of your ſouls, of the ſhortneſs of your time, and to live in expectation of an eternal ſtate—that you ſhould habitually neglect to do this public honor to our bleſſed Redeemer, is what we cannot juſtify, nor well account for. We cannot—we dare not think, that all, who abſent themſelves from the Lord's table, are ſtrangers to the power of godlineſs; it would be uncharitable

charitable ſo much as to ſuſpect this. But ſurely religion hath not its proper influence on their minds; if it had, they could not refuſe this expreſſion of regard to Chriſt; their grateful ſouls would rejoice in every opportunity of teſtifying their love to this bleſſed Redeemer, and of commemorating his love to them. With reſpect to ſome who do not attend this ordinance of Chriſt, we have reaſon to believe, they do not turn their backs upon it without ſenſible grief and remorſe; they are convinced of their obligations to their Saviour and Lord, but they have ſome miſtaken notions of the ordinance, or they have doubts about their qualifications for it. They would gladly wait on Chriſt in this way of his appointment, but they fear they ſhould not be worthy gueſts; or are jealous of themſelves, that they ſhould not walk agreably to their profeſſion. Theſe are much to be pitied, as they cannot but have much anxiety and diſtreſs in their own minds, and muſt be ſtrangely tortured, between their deſire to obey the command of Chriſt, and the fear leſt they ſhould not come with acceptance. Where perſons have ſuch difficulties and fears, however faulty they may be in entertaining them, their neglecting this ordinance is not to be conſidered as equally criminal with their's, who give themſelves no thought about the matter, or think of it only with a careleſs indifference. A merciful God will without doubt make all gracious allowances. But as their difficulties and fears are a ſecret between

God

God and their own ſouls, or are known only to a few, their abſenting themſelves ſpeaks the ſame language to the world, and therefore reflects the ſame diſhonor on God, as doth the abſence of thoſe who are careleſs and ſecure. This appearance of things, and the conſtruction which may be put upon their conduct, ſhould make them cautious, how they give occaſion for ſuch offences, by yielding to unreaſonable ſcruples and objections; and ſhould give them the moſt ſerious concern, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameleſs.

It may not be amiſs to add, that by your not communicating at the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper, you not only diſhonor God, but you greatly hurt and injure your own ſouls. You deprive yourſelves of the advantages you might reaſonably hope to receive by a ſerious conſciencious attendance upon it; theſe advantages are ſo many and great, that we may juſtly excite you to it as a privilege, as well as charge it upon you as a duty. Your omitting this duty is, we are perſuaded, the cauſe of that languor and indifference in the ſervice of God —of that declenſion of religion in your ſoul—and of thoſe fears about your ſtate, which you ſo frequently complain of.—You do not partake of that ſpiritual food which Chriſt hath provided for his church, and therefore do not receive that nouriſhment from him, which is of ſo much importance in the chriſtian life—You do not obey a plain pre-

cept

cept of your Saviour—your dying Saviour—and are therefore juſtly apprehenſive, that as you have neglected to remember him at his table on earth, he will not remember you when he cometh in his kingdom.——A neglect of this ordinance makes death-beds uncomfortable: Many have lamented in their laſt hours, that they have not obeyed this expreſs command, that they have publicly diſhonored the Saviour of men, by their criminal omiſſion of this duty.

Further, By abſenting yourſelves from the Lord's table, you caſt ſtumbling blocks in the way of others; they are diſcouraged from making a profeſſion, when they ſee perſons afraid to engage in ſuch a ſolemn tranſaction, who have been longer in the ſchool of Chriſt, and who are much better acquainted with religion, than they can pretend to be. This is a conſideration which ought deeply to affect parents, and others who ſtand in a ſuperior relation. It may reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that their example will have great influence on their children and ſervants, eſpecially where it falls in with the natural depravity and backwardneſs of the human heart. They ſhould, therefore, ſacredly avoid every thing, which tends to give thoſe under their care light thoughts of religion—to hinder them from attending their duty,—or to make them eaſy in the omiſſion of it.

But

But let who will neglect the inſtitutions of religion, it is no argument that you may neglect them. Poſſibly, your parents have particular reaſons for abſenting themſelves from the Lord's table, which do not affect you. Whether they have or not, your duty is plain, to have reſpect to all the commandments of Chriſt. If your parents ſin, it is no reaſon that you ſhould ſin with them. You ought to follow their good examples, but may by no means follow them to do evil. Perhaps by performing your duty, you may ſtimulate them to perform their's.

You may not excuſe yourſelf from attending on the ſupper of the Lord, becauſe you are young, and are not yet ſettled in the world. You are not ſo young, but you may die; or, if you are ſpared in life, it will afford you unſpeakable comfort, that you made the dedication of yourſelf to God in your early days. Whereas, if you defer this great and neceſſary work, new temptations and difficulties will ariſe, and there is danger that you will never engage in it at all. This is a conſideration of great weight, with reſpect to the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper. Many young people, being deeply impreſſed with the truths of religion, have had ſerious intentions of coming to the table of the Lord, but they have put it off from time to time, till they have grown eaſy in their neglect, and contracted an almoſt total indifference about it. The danger of ſuch an un-

unhappy effect is a good reaſon, why you ſhould make haſte and not delay to keep this commandment of God.

But am I to come to this ordinance, without any preparation—without any regard to God—any deſires after Chriſt—any concern for my ſpiritual and eternal intereſt—and while I know myſelf to be careleſs and indifferent about the things of religion ?—By no means. We ſhall endeavor under the next head to guard againſt ruſhing precipitately to divine ordinances. But if you are really unprepared, and know yourſelf to be ſo ; what is to be done ? Are you to ſit down ſatisfied, and as if you had no concern with the ſacrament, becauſe,in your preſent ſtate, you cannot worthily partake of it ? Is not the command ſtill to you, "Do this in remembrance of me" ? Is it a ſufficient reaſon for your neglect of this inſtitution, that you are in ſo bad a frame, that you dare not make a profeſſion of religion, or take the covenant of God into your mouth ? Do you plead this as an excuſe ? Surely it is the worſt plea you could make. Such unpreparedneſs is your fault; and can that which is your fault and your ſin, be a ſufficient excuſe for your neglect of a command of Chriſt ? Or is it any excuſe at all ? Methinks it ought to alarm you, that you are in ſuch a ſtate, that you dare not make a profeſſion of religion ; that you are ſhut out from communion with the people of God; that you may not partake of

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that bread and wine, which were designed to nourish and comfort the souls of men. While you are unprepared for the Lord's supper, you are unprepared for death, you are unfit for the kingdom of heaven. If you are unworthy to unite with the saints on earth, how can you have an admission into the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, or unite with the spirits of just men made perfect? Every time you leave the Lord's table, and are, as it were, excluded from this institution of Christ, consider with yourself, what if I should be excluded from the marriage supper of the Lamb—should be shut out from the presence of Christ—and doomed to an everlasting separation from Him? Is a state which may terminate in such awful destruction to be continued in? Ought you not, with the utmost earnestness, to implore the Spirit and grace of God, that you may be delivered out of it? Should you not seek every disposition, which is necessary to prepare you for the Lord's table, and to make you a worthy guest there? This is the way to get these objections removed. But nothing can be more perverse and unreasonable than to suppose, that any are excusable in their neglect of this ordinance, because they are resolved not to be prepared for it. And though persons of such a temper are not to be encouraged to come to the sacrament, yet let them not think that their neglect is an innocent thing: A prince, who invites guests to an entertainment, is justly offended, if they

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do not come; it is no excuſe that they have not a ſuitable habit, when he alloweth them to ſupply themſelves out of his own ward-robe. There is, oh ſinner, grace enough in Chriſt, but if you will not accept and improve it, nothing awaits you but indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh.

But oftentimes, they, who make theſe objections, are better prepared than they are willing to own, and perhaps much better than ſome who come to this ordinance. Hypocrites boldly preſume, while many diffident trembling chriſtians tarry away. Their fears keep them from attending an inſtitution, which was deſigned as a happy means of removing them. If you find deſires after Chriſt, and the bleſſings he hath to beſtow, though you cannot determine theſe deſires to be gracious, if you are determined by the help of God, to devote yourſelves to Him, and to live as the goſpel teaches you to live, you are the perſons whom Chriſt invites to his table. Nor will it free you from your obligation to obey Him, that you have doubts and fears about your qualifications for this ordinance. You cannot neglect it and be blameleſs.

Many are deterred from the Lord's table by that paſſage in the epiſtle of Paul to the Corinthians, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himſelf, not diſcerning the Lord's body." † But this text, rightly underſtood,

† 1 Cor. 11. 29.

underſtood, need not give any ſerious perſon the leaſt uneaſineſs. The apoſtle explains what he means by their eating and drinking *unworthily*, in thoſe words, "not diſcerning the Lord's body." The Corinthians, inſtead of coming to the Lord's table as a religious rite, came to it as to a common meal. They uſed the church, as one expreſſes it, more like an eating or a tipling houſe, than like the houſe of God. This was a notorious abuſe of the ordinance, it was moſt unworthy conduct, it was irreverent and profane. The unworthy partaking therefore, which the apoſtle condemns, reſpects the manner in which they attended the ſacrament, their behaviour at that time; and not their general ſtate, or the habitual frame of their minds. Gracious perſons may poſſibly, through incaution, be guilty of this eating and drinking unworthily, they ought, in ſome places, and under ſome circumſtances, to be greatly on their guard. The word rendered by our tranſlators, *damnation*, doth not at all refer to that puniſhment, to which the wicked will be conſigned in a future ſtate, it is rendered *judgment* in the margin; and the context plainly ſhews, that the judgment intended was wholly of a temporal nature; it immediately follows, "for this cauſe, many are ſick and weakly among you, and many ſleep." Their indecent profane carriage bro't ſuch diſcredit on chriſtianity, that God ſaw fit to teſtify againſt it, by inflicting temporal evils upon them, ſome were ſick and ſome died. But as to puniſhment in another world, or the

damnation of hell, not one word is ſaid about it. Nor is it ſaid, that theſe perſons, criminal as they were, would be ſentenced to it. The apoſtle intimates, that the very end, for which theſe perſons were puniſhed, was, that they might not be puniſhed in another ſtate. "But when we are judged, we are chaſtened of the Lord, that we might not be condemned with the world."

We own, that if a perſon partakes of the Lord's ſupper unworthily, in a careleſs irreverent manner, and never repents of ſo great a ſin, he may expect condemnation in another ſtate; this is a truth, tho' it is not the truth conveyed to us in this place. But what do we ſay in this more than we may ſay of any other inſtitution? If we pray unworthily, if we hear unworthily, if we ſpend the time of divine worſhip, in laughing, whiſpering, if we ſet ourſelves to ſleep, or to gaze on the objects around us, ſo as to caſt contempt on the duties we are called to engage in, theſe ſins as certainly expoſe to future puniſhment, as unworthy partaking of the ſacrament. And yet, would any one, for this reaſon, neglect theſe duties, or totally abſtain from them? No; if he acts wiſely, he will repent of what is amiſs, and endeavor to correct it for the time to come. This is the method we ſhould take with reſpect to the duty we are conſidering.

Are you ſo incumbered with worldly cares, that you cannot find time to prepare for this ordinance? Muſt you go to your farm and your merchandize,

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and for this reaſon do you neglect this inſtitution? This is a certain evidence, that you prefer the world to Chriſt, and ſpiritual and eternal bleſſings; and may you not then juſtly fear, that he will diſown and reject you another day? So the King is repreſented as dealing with thoſe who would not come to his feaſt. §

Are any of you fearful, that, by making a profeſſion of religion, you ſhall he under ſtronger obligations to holineſs, than you now are?—It is an excuſe you may well be aſhamed of. There cannot be a ſtronger reaſon for a compliance with this precept of our Saviour. Rectitude of heart and life is your duty—it is your intereſt—it is what you pretend to ſee the neceſſity of—You find, by daily experience, the too little efficacy of the arguments and motives of religion; the diſpoſition of your mind, and the practice of your life, are very different from what they ought to be. Can you then, convinced as you are, of the neceſſity of a conformity to the nature and will of God, omit any means of attaining to this bleſſed end? Will you live in the habitual neglect of an inſtitution, ſo wiſely adapted to make you what you ought to be, as is the ſupper of the Lord? and will you dare to give as a reaſon, that you ſhall be obliged to greater ſtrictneſs and purity? You have reaſon to fear, not only that you are yet in an unrenewed ſtate; but that you ſhall always continue ſo—That you ſhall loſe all impreſſions of religion, and grow abſo-

§ Matt. 22. beg.

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lutely careleſs and ſecure.——One reaſon why I am ſo earneſt in preſſing this duty is, becauſe I am perſuaded, it hath often been a check and reſtraint to perſons through the whole courſe of their lives; and a powerful excitement to holy living. The ſenſe they have of obligation from their public profeſſion, hath made them much more regular and watchful than they would otherwiſe have been, and hath fixed the principles of religion in their ſouls. There are, 'tis true, melancholy inſtances of apoſtacy, ſome have been, and are a diſgrace to their profeſſion. But it can be no reaſon, why others ſhould neglect an ordinance ſo well adapted to promote their beſt good, that it hath not this effect on every one who attends it. It may well be expected, that there will be hypocrites in the church; there was a Judas even in the college of the apoſtles. Weak as you are in yourſelves, the grace of Chriſt is ſufficient to preſerve you, and to keep you from falling.

I have now endeavored to remove the obſtructions that are in the way of many, and keep them from coming to the Lord's table. It is an ordinance by no means to be neglected, and it is ſurpriſing that any ſerious perſon can live in the omiſſion of this duty, without conſtant pain and uneaſineſs. They certainly practiſe, as if they tho't the table of the Lord contemptible, and lead thoſe who obſerve them to deſpiſe this ſacred inſtitution. Whereas by their ſerious and exemplary attendance, they might quicken others to their duty.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

The Table of the Lord rendered contemptible.

MALACHI I. 7.

Ye ſay the table of the Lord is contemptible.

I SHALL think I have done an important ſervice to the intereſt of religion and to your ſouls, if I may be any way inſtrumental, to awaken in you, my hearers, a juſt regard to the holy inſtitution of the ſupper. With this view, I endeavored in a former diſcourſe, to ſet before you the evil and danger of neglecting a religious rite, ſo expreſly enjoined on his diſciples by our bleſſed Lord. This is to deſpiſe the table of the Lord. But we are not leſs guilty of this impiety, if we ruſh upon a chriſtian profeſſion without thought and deliberation. We ought to act, in ſo important a tranſac-

tion,

tion, with great ſerioufneſs and ſolemnity. I go on, therefore, to obſerve

Secondly, They practically adopt the language of our text, who come to the Lord's ſupper with apparent careleſſneſs and indevotion. If you was invited, by one greatly your ſuperior, to an entertainment, you would think it a piece of reſpect, to have on your beſt attire, and to appear before him in a clean and decent habit. Every one would think you put an affront upon him, if you came to his table in a ſordid ſlovenly dreſs. The greater the perſon who invited you, the more careful would you be. If it was your Prince, with what ſollicitude would you avoid every thing indecent, every thing he would be likely to diſapprove of? And ſhall we not be much more ſollicitous to be ſuitably adorned, when we come before Him, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The habit of the body is indeed of little importance; it is the temper of the mind He chiefly regards; and it is infinitely offenſive to this holy Lord God, when we preſent ourſelves before Him without due thought and conſideration; and the more ſolemn the ordinance in which we approach Him, the more careful ſhould we be. Here,

Firſt, They caſt contempt on the table of the Lord, who have hypocritical views in coming to that holy ordinance. By hypocritial views,

views, I intend your putting on a ſhew of religion, not from any regard to God—not from any ſenſe of the authority of our bleſſed Redeemer, or your obligations to him :—But merely in conformity to thoſe whom you would be thought to imitate—that you may appear to men to be religious—that the world may think favorably of you—that you may avoid any outward inconvenience—or may have ſome temporal advantage. Nothing can be more contrary to the great deſign of this inſtitution, than to proſtitute it to ſuch unworthy purpoſes—to make uſe of it to promote ſiniſter worldly ends. "Do this," ſays our Lord, "in remembrance of me." This religious rite was eſtabliſhed, to affect our ſouls with a ſenſe of the great things JeſusChriſt hath done and ſuffered for ſinful man—to remind us of his love—of our infinite obligations to him—and, in this way, to cure us of our moral diſorders—to purify our ſouls—to promote the chriſtian temper—and to quicken us to all holy obedience. And that it may have theſe effects ſhould be our aim in attending upon it. Can any thing be more affrontive to the great Author of our religion, than to lay aſide theſe pure and ſpiritual views, and to make uſe of this ſacred inſtitution, to carry on deſigns that are quite foreign from it ? This is like thoſe, who carried their merchandize into the temple, whom ourLord expelled with that ſevere rebuke, "It is written, my houſe ſhall be called the houſe of prayer, but

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ye have made it a den of thieves." And though He may not think it neceſſary to teſtify againſt our impiety in the preſent ſtate, yet he undoubtedly will, unleſs we repent, in that day, when He will come to judge the world in righteouſneſs. I am far from throwing diſcouragements in the way of ſuch as are willing to come to this ordinance; but who can help being aſtoniſhed at the hardineſs of thoſe, that venture to approach this holy inſtitution, when at the ſame time they feel in themſelves no ſerious deſires or purpoſes, and ſo cannot but know they are unworthy partakers; eſpecially, if they are conſcious, that their intentions in coming are directly contrary to what they ought to be!

While upon this head, I cannot but expreſs my grief, that this holy ſacrament, which was deſigned only for ſpiritual purpoſes, is, in our nation, uſed as a teſt for civil and military offices; whereby multitudes of a moſt profligate character are laid under an almoſt inſuperable temptation, to come to the Lord's table—to be guilty of horrid hypocriſy—a moſt daring profanation of holy things: And the miniſters of Chriſt have no legal power, to refuſe the ſacred elements to the vileſt debauchee, who demands them as a qualification for an office. Such an abuſe and perverſion of this ordinance hath an awful tendency to render it contemptible; and may be juſtly eſteemed one cauſe of that infidelity and impiety, which are ſo generally

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ly complained of by the friends of religion and virtue. May God awaken thoſe to whom it belongs, to remove this ſtumbling-block out of the way, and to reform an abuſe which hath been long offenſive to the more ſerious part of the nation, both conformiſts and non-conformiſts! This leads me to ſay

Secondly, It makes the Lord's table contemptible, when they who are openly wicked and profane preſume to approach this holy ordinance. The only reaſon of our eating and drinking bread and wine in the ſacramental ſupper is, that Jeſus Chriſt hath commanded it. And if the will and authority of Chriſt is the only foundation upon which we obſerve this religious rite, it plainly follows that our obſerving it is an implicit acknowlegement of his authority to impoſe commands upon us; or, in other words that He is our Lord, and that we are bound to ſubmit to him in all things; for if he hath a right to our obedience in one inſtance, he hath a right to it in all other inſtances. Our coming to the ſacrament is in ſhort a profeſſion of the chriſtian religion. But how awfully contemptible is ſuch a profeſſion, when made by men who live in known ſin, and indulge to practices that are directly contrary to the laws of Chriſt and the rules of the goſpel. Can there be greater prevarication, than for a man to go immediately from the commiſſion of the moſt flagitious crimes to partake of the Lord's

ſupper ? This is to trifle with God in a ſacred act of religion ; it is worſe than trifling, it is boldly to affront and diſhonor him. No temptation, no worldly proſpects can be any excuſe for it. " The ſacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord." No pretended acts of devotion, no glittering appearance of religion, can be pleaſing to God, which come from perſons thus defiled with ſin. Profeſſors of this character can, in no ſober or religious ſenſe, be ſaid to remember Chriſt ; they cannot have any deſires after the bleſſings of the new covenant, of which this ordinance is a ſign or token. To them we may apply the words of the pſalmiſt, " Unto the wicked God ſaith, what haſt thou to do to declare my ſtatutes, or that thou ſhouldeſt take my covenant into thy mouth ? Seeing thou hateſt inſtruction, and caſteſt my words behind thee. When thou ſaweſt a thief, then thou conſentedſt with him, and haſt been partaker with adulterers. Thou giveſt thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou ſitteſt and ſpeakeſt againſt thy brother, thou ſlandereſt thine own mother's ſon." Such as theſe ſhould ceaſe to do evil, and learn to do well, before they approach the table of the Lord.

Nor can it either be ſafe or decent, for one who hath been a notorious habitual ſinner, to come to this holy ordinance, immediately on his finding himſelf awakened to ſome ſerious concern for his eternal

eternal ſalvation, even though he reſolves to amend his life, and feels a preſent regard to his Lord and Saviour. There have been ſuch numerous inſtances of perſons greatly alarmed by the word and providence of God, and apparently reſolved to ſeize the kingdom of heaven with violence, who have in a very little time, loſt all impreſſions of religion, and relapſed into careleſſneſs, irreligion, and vice; that it ſhould make every one jealous and diffident of himſelf. If upon every alarm of conſcience, men ruſh on a public profeſſion, there is great danger of their injuring their own ſouls, and bringing diſcredit on the chriſtian name. You are all ſenſible, how much religion hath ſuffered by ſuch raſh intruſions. Sollicitous as I am, to ſee the Lord's table full of gueſts, I ſincerely deſire to ſee it filled only with thoſe who are worthy to be there. They who have led a life of diſſipation and vice ought to give ſome proof of a change of diſpoſition, both to themſelves and others: They may not truſt to ſome ſudden emotions, but ſhould take time to try the ſtrength of their reſolutions and purpoſes; they ſhould count the coſt of being chriſtians. It is true, wickedneſs is no excuſe for not coming to the Lord's table, becauſe men ought not to be wicked; they ought to repent and reform, but while men are habitually wicked and profane they ought not to come there. They ſhould be willing to ſtay away, and they who have the power of admiſſion ſhould take effectual

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care to debar them, if they are hardy enough to offer themſelves. Would to God, I could think there had been that care on both hands there ought to have been : The table of the Lord would not have been rendered contemptible as it now is !

Thirdly, They practically ſay, the table of the Lord is contemptible, who come to the Lord's ſupper without ſerious thought and circumſpection. When Samuel went to ſacrifice at Bethlehem, he ſaid to the people of that city, "Sanctify yourſelves, and come with me to the ſacrifice." There were particular purifications required of the Jews before they attended their ſolemn feaſts. Theſe external purifications were deſigned to anſwer moral purpoſes, to lead them to ſeek after ſpiritual cleanſing or a right temper of mind towards God, when they made their ſolemn approaches to him ; and unleſs they were attended with the thing ſignified, however they might anſwer the Jewiſh law, and entitle to the privileges of that diſpenſation, they could not render men acceptable to God, or put them in the way of obtaining any ſpiritual or eternal bleſſings. Theſe carnal ordinances are done away by the coming of Jeſus Chriſt, but that to which they were deſigned to lead their thoughts is ſtill neceſſary. God hath his inſtitutions of religion under the goſpel as he had under the law : Chriſtians ought to approach theſe with caution and reverence. The Lord's ſupper is an ordinance peculiar to chriſtianity, it is an explicit acknowlegement of

of the authority of Jeſus Chriſt; ſome particular inquiry and preparation ſeems fit and proper before we enter on ſuch a ſolemn tranſaction.

The apoſtle ſays, "Let a man examine himſelf and ſo let him eat." Some have interpreted this expreſſion, that perſons who could not determine their ſtate to be good, or that they were ſincere diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt, were not to come to the Lord's ſupper, as if it had been ſaid, Let a man examine whether he is a good chriſtian, and then, and not till then, let him eat. Such an examination is a great chriſtian duty, and no time can be more proper for it, than when we are coming to the Lord's table; but it may well be made a queſtion, whether this is what the apoſtle immediately intends in this place. His meaning ſeems rather to be, that a man ſhould examine himſelf, whether he underſtands the nature of this ordinance, and propoſes to attend it in a manner agreable to the deſign of it, and ſo ſhould eat, making a proper difference between the Lord's ſupper, and a common meal, attending it in a ſober religious manner. But in whatever ſenſe we underſtand this paſſage, it plainly ſuppoſes, that there is ſome previous thought and deliberation neceſſary to our coming aright to the Lord's table; that all who approach it ſhould come with a humble, ſerious, devout temper. They ſhould ſeek the influence of the Holy Spirit to make them ſincere in

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this ſacred tranſaction, and to cleanſe them according to the purification of the ſanctuary. It is fit and right, if not abſolutely neceſſary, that we ſhould give up ourſelves to God in our ſecret retirements, before we publicly aſſume the character of chriſtians.

It is for want of this ſerious deliberation, that too many fall away from God, and diſgrace their chriſtian profeſſion. They enter upon it without thought, have no ſenſe of their own weakneſs, and take no care to ſecure Divine aids. They act, with reſpect to this religious rite, as if it was a matter of very light and trivial concern. And by ſuch a conduct evidence, that they look on the table of the Lord as contemptible, and they make it appear contemptible to others. The men of the world think lightly of Divine ordinances, when they obſerve the levity—the total indifference with which ſome men run to them. It is of great importance, that we ſhew forth Chriſt's death at his table; but it is equally important, that we ſhould conſider what we are about, and ſhould have a right diſpoſition when we draw nigh to God. Without this, it is very unlikely, that the ordinance will be of any ſpiritual advantage. It will make us worſe rather than better.

The preparation of which I have been ſpeaking is peculiarly neceſſary, when we firſt preſent ourſelves at the Lord's table; but ſomething of the ſame kind is ſuitable, if we have opportunity every time

time we make our approach to it, tho' not of equal importance. There are certain meditations which are proper at all times, but which are particularly adapted to prepare our minds for the ſacramental ſupper—As the nature and deſign of the ordinance —the wiſdom and goodneſs of the inſtitution— The love and grace of God in ſending his Son to die for us—The great things which Chriſt did and ſuffered, that he might atone for our ſins and bring us to God—The evil of ſin which made ſuch an atonement neceſſary—The obligations his infinite benevolence lays us under—The bleſſings Chriſt hath purchaſed—and the importance of our being intereſted in them.——There are certain actions which are proper at all times, but which ſeem peculiarly ſeaſonable when we are coming to the holy ſupper. Such are the ſolemn conſecration of ourſelves to God, and engagement to be his—a ſerious ſolemn inquiry into our ſtate, our principles of action, the views we have in our religious duties, our deſires, our purpoſes, what we have been, and what we deſign to be—A penitent humiliation and contrition of ſoul for what hath been amiſs—a believing application to the blood of Chriſt for pardon and cleanſing—and fervent prayer to God for renewing and ſanctifying grace.

But you will ſay, what if I cannot find any exerciſe of grace, or do not perceive, after all my examination, that gracious temper which I ought to have ?

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What ſhall I do then ? I anſwer, I am ſaying what we ought, and what we ſhould deſire to be at all times, and in particular what are proper exerciſes of mind when we are coming to the Lord's table, but I by no means ſay, that we may not come, unleſs we are conſcious we are entirely what we ought to be. We tell you what chriſtianity is, and what it requires you to be ; we ſet before you the ſublime ſtandard, that you may be excited to come as near it as you can. We ſay that God requires purity of heart, when you draw near to him in his holy inſtitutions, but we do not ſay, that if you have not that purity which he requires, you are excuſable in the neglect of them. We declare to you, that when you hear the word you ſhould mix it with faith, but we do not declare, that unleſs you have faith you ſhould not hear the word. We aſſert that when you pray, you ought to lift up holy hands, but we do not aſſert, that unleſs you have holy hands, you muſt not pray. So we ſay, you ought to come to the Lord's ſupper in the exerciſe of knowlege, faith, love, repentance, but we do not ſay, that every one who hath not theſe graces eateth and drinketh judgment to himſelf. Upon the whole, they ſinfully preſume, who come to the ſacrament in a light careleſs manner : It is a ſolemn religious action, and we ſhould endeavor to prepare our minds for it by meditation and prayer. Chriſt requires that we ſhould thus ſhew forth his death, and we ought to come to this ordinance in obedience to him, and not in compliance with cuſtom,

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or with any worldly and ſinful views. He that hath ſuch a frame of heart is in no danger of being an unworthy partaker of the Lord's ſupper; and tho' he ſhould not be in that ſtate he was ready to hope he was, he will, according to the common courſe of Divine grace, be more likely to meet with God, and be in a fairer way to obtain a bleſſing, than if he had lived in the neglect of ſo plain a command.

Having ſaid ſo much of preparation for the Lord's table, ſome may be ready to enquire, whether it is neceſſary, whenever they are about to come to this ordinance, to have ſome ſtated time, in a ſolemn manner, to prepare themſelves for it? To which it may be replied, That as there is no ſuch injunction in ſcripture, no one hath a right to enjoin it. However, this ſacred rite implies ſo much profeſſed by us, and is ſuch a diſtinguiſhing badge of the chriſtian religion, that they whoſe leiſure will admit of it, do well to ſeparate ſome particular time, to think what they are going about, —to implore the Divine preſence—to commune with their own hearts—renewedly to dedicate themſelves to God—and to employ their minds in ſuch meditations and acts of devotion, as tend to put them in a right frame, when they draw near to God in this holy inſtitution. But, expedient as this is, I am aware that ſome chriſtians have carried their ſcruples upon this head even to a degree of ſuperſtition; they muſt have days as well as hours; and when

they have not had time to prepare themſelves according to their uſual cuſtom, they have turned their backs on the ordinance. It is beſt, where it can be, to take time for preparation; but when any are neceſſarily prevented, as may frequently be the caſe with thoſe who are in a ſtate of ſervitude, and ſometimes with others, they ought to rely on the grace of Chriſt to ſupply the want of previous preparation, and by no means to affront him by putting an open ſlight on his inſtitution. A particular preparation for ſacramental occaſions "being only a prudential thing, no where enjoined in the word of God, muſt not be looked upon as abſolutely neceſſary, much leſs the ſpending ſuch an exact portion of time in the exerciſes of devotion. Let us employ what time we can command, and find by experience to be of uſe to this purpoſe, and we have nothing further to trouble ourſelves about, but putting our hearts in the beſt order we can, and ſo moderating our affections to all ſublunary things, that as often as we are called to duty, we may be in a proper diſpoſition for the performance of it; let us do this, and we need not doubt of our being acceptable gueſts at the table of the Lord."

I am in the Third place to ſet before you your contempt of the Lord's table, when you attend this ordinance with irreverence or vanity of mind. ——It tends greatly to render this religious rite contemptible, if there is any thing indecent or irre-

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verent in our external deportment. This is what the apoſtle blames in the Corinthians. They were ſo far from ſetting down at the Lord's table as a ſpiritual entertainment, and as if they meant to improve themſelves in the chriſtian temper, that they made no difference between that and their common meals; yea, their behavior was ſo riotous and indecent, that it would have been a diſgrace to their common entertainments. "When ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's ſupper. For in eating every one taketh before other, his own ſupper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What have ye not houſes to eat and to drink in? or deſpiſe ye the church of God?" One can ſcarce conceive of a more profane and unworthy behavior than this of the Corinthians. It is hoped, the Lord's table is not thus abuſed, or the inſtitution affronted, among us. Perhaps, there is very little to be blamed in the external deportment of thoſe who come to the holy euchariſt. The countenance of the communicants is grave, the poſture is decent, and the geſture is agreable, becoming ſuch a ſolemn approach to God, free from levity on the one hand, and affectation and ſuperſtition on the other.——Would to God, the ſame could be ſaid with truth of the inward man—that the hearts of all who partake of the Lord's ſupper were right with him! But alas! when we have drawn nigh to God in this ordinance, hath there been nothing in any of us unbecoming this ſacred act of religion?—nothing which gives occaſion for painful

ful reflections ?—nothing which hath been offenſive to that Being, who is a Diſcerner of the tho'ts of the heart ? " Ye ſay the table of the Lord is contemptible," when it is not your conſtant deſire and endeavor, that it may anſwer the ends for which it was deſigned : Eſpecially, if you indulge to any thoughts or diſpoſitions which contradict the great end and deſign of it. It is true, theſe inward motions of the ſoul are not viſible to the world, and therefore you do not by them diſhonor God before men : But they pollute the ordinance in the ſight of God ; they diſcover contempt of the great Author of it ; and a diſregard of the gracious deſign he had in the inſtitution. When you put on a ſhew of ſerioufneſs which you have not, and pretend a devotion which you do not exerciſe, nor ſo much as aim at, you practically deny the omniſcience of God ; you act as if he did not know what paſſes within you ; or, as if you thought it of no conſequence to approve yourſelves to him ; you evidence that you value the praiſe of men, more than the praiſe of God, ſince you are ſo ſollicitous to appear well to them, while you neglect Him, who ſearches the heart and tries the reins of the children of men. The language of your practice is, " the table of the Lord is contemptible"—When you content yourſelves with barely attending the duty, without any concern about the frame and diſpoſition of your hearts there—When you allow your minds to wander, and indulge to thoughts

about the world and your temporal affairs, to ſubjects, which, though they might be lawful at other times, are not ſuitable to the preſent occaſion—Eſpecially, when your thoughts at the ſacrament are in themſelves ſinful, and ſuch as would be offenſive to God at any time—When you do not remember Chriſt at all, or remember him only in an indifferent ſuperficial manner.

Firſt, It is to caſt contempt on the Lord's table, when you content yourſelves with a bare attendance upon the ſacramental ſupper, without any concern about the frame and diſpoſition of your hearts there. It is not enough that we attend the inſtitutions of religion, unleſs we come to them as means of grace; and if we come to them as means of grace, we ſhall look to the end more than to the means. David had great deſires after the houſe of God, but his deſires did not terminate in the mere performance of duty, he deſired and ſought after the preſence and enjoyment of God, "O God, Thou art my God, early will I ſeek thee, my ſoul thirſteth for thee, my fleſh longeth for thee in a dry and thirſty land, where no water is; To ſee thy power and thy glory ſo as I have ſeen thee in thy ſanctuary." If at any time chriſtians attend upon a religious duty, and do not find thoſe diſpoſitions which are peculiarly ſuited to that duty, they come away diſappointed and humbled. They think that ſabbath, that ſacrament loſt, in which they do not

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gain ſome knowlege of divine things, nor experience ſome ſpiritual advantage. But when, on the other hand, they find the love of God improved in their hearts, when they ſee more of the divine excellency, and their ſouls cleave to him in holy affection and delight; when they are more afraid of ſin and more watchful againſt it; when they gain ſtrength againſt temptation; are more firmly perſuaded of the truth of religion, and feel its influence on their hearts: When chriſtians find theſe the happy effects of their attendance on divine ordinances, they cannot but highly prize and value them. And they ſhew their eſteem of the inſtitutions of religion, when they look for ſuch bleſſed effects from them, and have theſe in view in the obſervance of them. But when men content themſelves with a bare attendance, and are indifferent whether they profit by them or not, when they have no concern about their hearts and the exerciſes of their minds, it ſhows that they have no ſincerity in their profeſſions of religion. To pretend to draw near to God in the ways of his appointment, and not to deſire thoſe ſpiritual bleſſings which they were deſigned to convey, is not merely to deſpiſe theſe bleſſings, it is to deſpiſe God himſelf—to contradict the deſign of the duty—and to deprive their ſouls of all benefit thereby. I will not ſay that ſuch communicants will not receive any advantage from the ordinances of the goſpel, God is ſometimes found of them that ſeek him not, but it is very unlikely that they will, and their careleſſneſs

leſſneſs in attending on duties is doubtleſs one reaſon why many find them ſo uſeleſs and unprofitable.

Secondly, You deſpiſe the table of the Lord, when you allow your minds to wander, and indulge to thoughts, which might be lawful at other times, but are not ſuited to this particular ſeaſon. The ſituation of men in the world is ſuch, that it is neceſſary often to think of worldly things, to lay plans for our comfortable ſubſiſtence, and to take proper ſteps to carry them into execution. Tho' we ought to ſeek firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs, yet other things are not to be neglected. But there are ſeaſons, when thoughts about our temporal affairs are improper and ſinful. They are ſo, whenever we are called to an immediate intercourſe with the Deity. At ſuch times, it becomes us to diſmiſs the world, and to fix our minds on things above, and not on things on the earth. When we come to the Lord's table, we ſhould be raiſed above the pleaſures, the amuſements, the profits, the honors of this world. Thinking on our ſecular affairs cannot be innocent when we are at this feſtival, becauſe it muſt neceſſarily ſhut out ſome religious meditation which we ought to have there. Every worldly thought which enters our mind at the ſacrament is an intruder, and as ſuch we ought to treat it, immediately to exclude and reject it. If we ſuffer our minds to rove to the enjoyments of time and ſenſe when we come to the

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Lord's table, ſuch thoughts will prevent that ſerious religious temper which ought to poſſeſs our ſouls there. They will eraſe all good impreſſions, and make our attendance unprofitable. 'Tis true, the hearts of the beſt are apt to wander, the world intrudes itſelf into our moſt ſacred tranſactions. But there is a vaſt difference between our having theſe thoughts involuntarily, and contrary to our deſire and endeavor, and our giving way to them or ſuffering them to dwell in us. A ſerious communicant, one who partakes of the Lord's ſupper in a right manner, looks upon all worldly thoughts as unfit while he makes this ſolemn approach to God; he ſtrives—he prays againſt them; and it is the grief of his heart, that the world hath ſuch a place within him, that he cannot riſe above it, even when he hath ſuch powerful incentives to a ſpiritual heavenly diſpoſition, as are preſented at the Lord's table. Do any of you then, when you ſit down at this holy inſtitution, apply your minds to worldly topics? Do you ſuffer vain thoughts—earthly deſires, to lodge within you? Do you meditate on your farms—your merchandize—your ſecular buſineſs—or your lucrative proſpects? you have reaſon to fear you are unworthy communicants. You treat the Lord's table with contempt, you cannot expect any ſpiritual advantage from the inſtitution, or that God will look on the duty as performed to him.———The contempt you caſt on this ordinance is ſtill greater, if in the

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Third place, Your thoughts at the ſacrament are in themſelves ſinful, and ſuch as would be offenſive to God at any other time. Worldly tho'ts are ſinful at this ſeaſon, becauſe they intrude at a time when you ought to be wholly employed in ſpiritual contemplations : It is much worſe—If you allow yourſelves in carnal, malicious, revengeful thoughts—If impure images and diſpoſitions preſent themſelves and find room within you—If your mind is filled with covetous, proud, ambitious deſires, purpoſes, and views. Such a temper is evil at any time. But it proves great perverſeneſs and obduracy of heart, if men give way to ſuch vain and wicked thoughts when they profeſs to engage in a ſacred act of religion. They deſpiſe that glorious Being before whom their hearts are naked and open ; and however, by their ſpecious pretences, they may gain the eſteem of men, they will certainly fail of the approbation of God. Their hypocritical ſervices are a ſtench in his noſtrils, and he can have no pleaſure in their offerings.

Fourthly, They treat the Lord's table with contempt, who either do not remember Chriſt at all, or only in a careleſs ſuperficial manner. The general deſign of this ordinance is contained in thoſe words of our bleſſed Saviour, "Do this in remembrance of me." If then your thoughts are not ill employed, that is, if they are not employed on ſubjects that are evil in themſelves, if you have religious thoughts, yet, if you do not remember

Chriſt, if He is not the ſubject of your contemplations, you do not comply with the deſign of the inſtitution ; and if this is diſregarded, with whatever frequency, and apparent ſerioufneſs you attend upon this religious rite, you practically ſay, the deſign was unneceſſary, and the command might have been omitted. It is very much the ſame language, if you content yourſelves with ſome tranſient thoughts of Jeſus Chriſt, which make no impreſſion on your hearts. It ought to be your great concern, not only to remember Chriſt, but that the remembrance of him may have its proper influence upon you, and that you may have thoſe ſentiments of love, gratitude, and obedience, which the inſtitution tends to inſpire. It ſhows great contempt of the Lord's ſupper, when men ſatisfy themſelves with ſuperficial unaffecting meditations, however fit and proper they may otherwiſe be—when they go to this ordinance and come from it with a lukewarm indifferent ſpirit, as if there was nothing valuable to be obtained there, or they had no ſollicitude to obtain it.

When we think what we ought to be when we come to the Lord's table, how much reaſon have many of us for humble penitent reflections !—Did we not ruſh upon a profeſſion with a criminal indifference, and even when we knew that our lives were a contradiction to our public declaration, diſſolute and vicious ?—Did we take time to deliberate on ſuch a ſolemn tranſaction, and enter upon it with ſerious meditation and earneſt prayer to God

God for light and direction? I fear ſome of us ſhall find, upon careful recollection, that we had very little concern about duty, no deſign to approve ourſelves to God, no deſire to be made wiſer or better: But that our main view was to make a good appearance to men, to gratify our pride, or ſome other paſſion which was predominant.—— When we have been at the Lord's table, inſtead of thoſe religious meditations which were proper on that ſacred occaſion, have we not indulged thoughts about our worldly buſineſs, and even irreligious and wicked thoughts? Have we not ſatisfied ourſelves with the performance of the duty, though we have had no particular regard to Jeſus Chriſt—no ſenſe of that infinite philanthropy, which it was the ſpecial deſign of this inſtitution to produce in our minds? Or if we have, at ſome times, found room for ſerious religious meditations, yet what a ſad mixture hath there been of formality, hypocriſy, and ſin! Let us call our faults to remembrance this day: The conſideration of them ſhould not lead us to neglect duty, as the manner of ſome is; but ſhould excite us, to make our application to the atoning blood of the great Redeemer, and to be more watchful for the time to come. Bleſſed be God, the ſetting down at the Lord's table in an unprepared or an unworthy manner is not an unpardonable offence, tho' ſome are ſo much more diſtreſſed about this than they are about any other, that it looks as if they thought it was. The blood of Chriſt cleanſeth from this as well as every other ſin.

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If perſons, by coming unworthily to this ordinance, expoſe themſelves to judgment, yet it by no means makes their eternal damnation neceſſary. Let none encourage themſelves from hence, in a careleſs approach to divine ordinances; ſuch levity of mind not only makes religion contemptible in the eyes of the thoughtleſs and profane, but tends dreadfully to harden our own hearts. And if ſome have too awful thoughts of the ſacrament, and carry their fears even to ſuperſtition, others are in ſtill greater danger of treating it with indifference. That our minds may be impreſſed with a becoming reverence; Let us remember, that Jeſus Chriſt is here preſent. And ſhall we dare to offend and affront him who is to be our final Judge! or rather, ſhall we do any thing, or indulge any temper, that will diſpleaſe him who hath ſhown ſuch inconceivable love to us?——What ſhame!—what horror! muſt poſſeſs the mind of one, who thinks of Chriſt at his table, and finds his heart full—of hypocriſy—of enmity to God—or malice to his brethren! —But on the other hand, how great the pleaſure of that man, who feels his heart warmed with the love of Chriſt, and can humbly appeal to him and ſay, Lord, Thou knoweſt all things, Thou knoweſt that I love Thee! Who, ſenſible of innumerable defects, hath ſuch views of the glory of the Redeemer, as to venture himſelf in his hands; and, under the greateſt preſſure of guilt and unworthineſs, can find reſt in this Almighty Saviour!

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

The Table of the Lord rendered contemptible.

MALACHI I. 7.

Ye ſay the table of the Lord is contemptible.

WHATEVER God commands we are ſure is right. A Being who is infinitely wiſe and good cannot enjoin any thing, but what is agreable to wiſdom and goodneſs. We ought to venerate every inſtitution of heaven, to obſerve all the duties of religion, and to do every thing in our power to reccommend them to others. The command to attend the Lord's ſupper is ſo expreſs, that no chriſtian ought to be eaſy in the neglect of it—But a bare attendance on this inſtitution is not enough to approve us to God, and therefore ought

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not to quiet our minds.——It becomes us to approach the table of the Lord with ſerioufneſs and reverence, we ſhould conſider and improve it as a mean of grace, and be chiefly ſollicitous to attain the end, to have the ſame mind that was in Chriſt, who hath gone before, ſetting us an example that we ſhould walk in his ſteps.—When we are at the Lord's table, we ought religiouſly to remember Jeſus Chriſt, the great Author of this inſtitution.—In our daily walk, we are to conſider our chriſtian character, and to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. It is owing, as hath been already obſerved, to the careleſſneſs and indifference of chriſtians in each of theſe reſpects, that this ordinance is deſpiſed, as it too generally is among us. "Ye ſay, the table of the Lord is contemptible." You ſay this, By a careleſs neglect of it—By ruſhing precipitately to it—By irreverence or levity of mind while you attend upon it—and by a life and converſation diſagreable to your chriſtian profeſſion. I have diſcourſed to the three firſt of theſe particulars.

I am now to ſhew, that you make the Lord's table contemptible, when your life and converſation are not agreable to your chriſtian profeſſion.

When men profeſs chriſtianity, and lay themſelves under ſolemn engagements to be the Lord's, they ought to be ſincere, they ought not to deal falſly with God. They prevaricate, if they have

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no desires and intentions to be what they profess—If they put on religion as a cloke, to hide the wickedness of their hearts, or to serve some sinister design. If there is any sincerity in them, they intend, by the help of God, to be christians, when they profess themselves the disciples of Christ. They design to do the will of God, when they solemnly promise it. I do not mean, that it is necessary to know they are gracious persons, when they profess the religion of Christ: But such a profession implies—a belief of divine revelation—a sense of the importance of the truths it contains—a desire at least that the institutions of religion should have their proper effect—and a determination, by the grace of God, to live as the gospel teaches them to live. Where this is the case, men will endeavor to form their lives by the precepts of christianity; and so far as they do this, they adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. When they practise otherwise, they cause the good ways of God to be evil spoken of, and make a religious profession contemptible, in the eyes of those who have not felt the power of religion on their hearts.

In speaking to this point, I shall first consider what kind of conversation is agreable to the gospel, and tends to the honor of God and religion—and then, on the other hand, when persons discredit religion; or, in the language of the text, "say the table of the Lord is contemptible."

First,

First, I am to ſay, what converſation that is, which is agreable to the goſpel, and tends to the honor of God and religion. You eaſily perceive, that this leads me to ſpeak of ſuch parts of the chriſtian life as are viſible to the world, at leaſt to thoſe who are near us and obſerve our conduct; and not of our ſecret and retired tranſactions. We ought, in all our deportment before others, to make the goſpel our rule; or, in the language of our bleſſed Saviour, to cauſe our light to ſhine before men, that they may ſee our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. We ought to evidence that chriſtianity is ſomething more than a name, and, as far as an external deportment can, that we are not only almoſt, but altogether chriſtians. We ſhould avoid what the law of God forbids, and practice what it enjoins. Chriſtians ſhould live above the world, they may not take any indirect methods to gain thoſe things which are pleaſant and agreable; nor at any time diſcover an anxiety about worldly enjoyments: They ſhould behave with calmneſs and reſignation when they meet with things that are contrary to fleſh and blood. They ſhould endeavor to practiſe duty with chearfulneſs, that all about them may ſee, they do not eſteem the commandments of God to be grievous reſtraints, or unreaſonable injunctions, but that their obedience is free and unconſtrained, and others may be induced to believe that Chriſt's yoke is eaſy and his burden light. I do not intend that any can be able to determine with certainty

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the frame of the heart, by the manner in which men perform their outward actions. There is no doubt but an artful hypocrite may conduct ſo as to impoſe on the moſt diſcerning eye; and may appear to delight in thoſe religious duties to which he hath an inward averſion. But it is no argument that a chriſtian ſhould put on a different appearance, becauſe a hypocrite will endeavor to appear as he does. That man gives very ſlender proof of his ſincerity, who purſues the enjoyments of this world with pleaſure and ſatisfaction, and in matters of religion acts with reluctance, or ſo as to lead others to think the ſervice of God is unpleaſant and diſagreable to him.

The chriſtian ſhould not, like the Syrian general, deſire, that in this thing the Lord would pardon his ſervant, but ſhould carefully abſtain from the very appearance of evil; and be willing to abridge himſelf of lawful pleaſures, if they are likely to prove a ſnare, or an occaſion of ſin; he ſhould even avoid things that are in themſelves indifferent, rather than offend a weak brother. It is not neceſſary he ſhould put on a preciſe ſupercilious air, or aſſume a ſour auſterity of manners; this is rather an affected ſhew of religion, than religion itſelf; but he ſhould always behave with ſuch ſerioufneſs and circumſpection, that they, who obſerve his courſe of life, may have reaſon to think he is afraid to offend God, and that it is his habitual deſire to pleaſe and

honor him. Agreably, he ſhould ſet a conſtant guard upon his lips, that he may never utter a raſh or ſinful word, but that his common converſation may anſwer ſome valuable purpoſe, and be, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, " to the uſe of edifying." He ſhould keep at a diſtance from all indecent mirth and levity, and preſerve a gravity and decorum, becoming one who hath a ſenſe of the account he muſt give unto the Judge of all the earth. He ſhould reverence " this glorious and fearful name, The Lord thy God," never uſing it in a light or thoughtleſs, much leſs profane manner. The ſabbath of the Lord ſhould be honorable in his eyes, and he ſhould endeavor to make it honorable in the eyes of others. He ſhould conſider it as a day which God hath ſet apart for himſelf, and employ the time in reading, meditation and devotion. In his attendance on public worſhip, he ſhould be conſtant and ſeaſonable, that he may have his part in the whole of the exerciſe ; and while he is in the houſe of God, he ſhould have a reverential regard to that All-perfect Being who is particularly preſent in the aſſembly of his ſaints ; avoiding a light careleſs air on the one hand, and ſloth and drowſineſs on the other.

A profeſſing chriſtian ſhould be ſober and temperate in all things, not indulging his appetites and ſenſual inclinations, not given to wine, not conforming to every ſilly and fantaſtic mode in his attire, but appearing with a modeſty becoming ſaints.

Chriſtians

Chriſtians ſhould deal juſtly with one another; they ſhould not injure or hurt their neighbours in order to ſerve themſelves; and ſhould deſpiſe all little arts and clandeſtine methods to raiſe themſelves to honor and affluence. In all their tranſactions they ſhould behave with uprightneſs and generoſity, ſo that their conduct may bear examining, and they may not run the hazard of being detected in any mean or evil practice. They ſhould be tender of their neighbour's reputation, loth to receive evil reports, much more to make or ſpread them. They ſhould always incline to the charitable ſide, believe all things, hope all things, and be diſpoſed to think and ſpeak well of all, ſo far as there is any juſt or reaſonable ground for favorable ſentiments and repreſentations. Their charity ſhould go further than good words or fair ſpeeches; they ſhould abound in acts of kindneſs, and be generouſly ready to ſupply the wants and relieve the neceſſities of their brethren.

Again, Chriſtians ſhould learn the due government of their paſſions. Their hopes and fears, their joys and ſorrows ſhould all be regulated by reaſon and religion, neither placed on improper objects, nor raiſed to an undue pitch. They ſhould be patient under afflictions, calm under reproaches, meek under injuries. Like their bleſſed Maſter, when reviled they ſhould not revile again, nor retaliate their wrongs even when it is in their power. They ſhould be clothed with humility, and evidence in their whole deportment, that they are ſenſible

ſible of their own weakneſs, ſinfulneſs, and guilt. They ſhould juſtify God whatever he brings upon them. Conſcious of demerit, their ſurprize, if any is expreſſed, will be, not that God inflicts ſo much, but that he doth not inflict more. They are diſpoſed to think others better than themſelves; & therefore, when their neighbours receive ſuperior marks of reſpect and honor, they will not envy their proſperity or repine at their happineſs, much leſs will they do any thing to blaſt their reputation or detract from their character. If in any thing a chriſtian excel other men, he will not treat them with haughtineſs, contempt, or neglect: But will behave to all with kindneſs, affability, reſpect, and condeſcenſion, as their ſituation and circumſtances require.

Profeſſors of religion ſhould carefully diſcharge the duties of every relation—Rulers ſhould endeavor to anſwer the great end of their inſtitution, to be miniſters of God for good; they ſhould conſult the public happineſs in their ſeveral departments—And while *they* are employed in promoting the weal of the community, thoſe who are placed under them ſhould endeavor to lighten the cares of government, by due ſubmiſſion to authority, leading quiet and peaceable lives in all godlineſs and honeſty.—Miniſters ſhould be faithful, diligent, and fervent in the work of the Lord—Their people ſhould hearken to them ſo far as they deliver the words of truth and ſoberneſs.—Parents and

heads

heads of families ſhould inſtruct their children and ſervants in the great truths of religion, and govern their houſes with firmneſs, diſcretion, and tenderneſs : They ſhould be conſtant in their devotions and exemplary in their walk—Children ſhould obey their parents, and ſervants be faithful to their maſters, and each in their reſpective ſtations ſhould endeavor to promote the peace, the comfort, the happineſs of the families to which they belong.—In ſhort, profeſſing chriſtians ſhould, in their whole deportment, endeavor to glorify God, and to recommend religion to all with whom they are converſant. They ſhould live up to the dignity of their character, be uniform in all parts of their behaviour, and maintain a cloſe walk with God at all times and in all ſeaſons. How lovely would religion appear, if it was thus exemplified in the lives of thoſe who profeſs it ! How many would be attracted by their amiable converſation ! What a change ſhould we ſoon perceive for the better ! and what happy times might we expect !

I am, in the Second place, to ſhew, when perſons who profeſs chriſtianity do by their practice diſcredit the religion they profeſs ; or, in other words, when the converſation of thoſe who partake of the Lord's ſupper is ſuch, as renders this holy ordinance contemptible in the eye of the world.—That there will be ſuch perſons in the church of Chriſt, he hath himſelf taught us to expect.—" When the Maſter of the houſe hath riſen up and

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ſhut to the door, and ye begin to ſtand without, and to knock at the door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us ; and he ſhall anſwer and ſay unto you, I know you not whence you are ; then ſhall ye begin to ſay, we have eaten and drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in our ſtreets. But he ſhall ſay, I tell you, I know you not whence you are ; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." ‖ Although theſe words did not immediately refer to the Lord's ſupper, which was not then inſtituted ; yet they doubtleſs repreſent the ſtate of men who had made pretences to religion, and had been unholy and wicked in their lives ; and they may very well be applied to thoſe who profeſs to commemorate the love of Chriſt at his table, and take no care to do the things which he hath commanded. Would to God there were no ſuch daring ſinners to be found ! But alas ! are there none who name the name of Chriſt and do not depart from iniquity ? Are there none, in theſe days, who call Chriſt, Lord, Lord, while they do not the things which he ſays ? Are there none who eat and drink with the King at his table, and are vicious and profligate in their lives ? If you are ſo happy as never to have known any of ſo flagitious a character, you muſt own it is poſſible for ſuch perſons to exiſt. And they who ſtand ſhould take heed leſt they fall. It cannot be amiſs to point out what courſe is inconſiſtent with that ſincere regard to Jeſus Chriſt which you profeſs to have, that you may abſtain from every appearance of it, may watch againſt every approach to it, and may ſhun

‖ Luke 13. 25, 26, 27.

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thoſe occaſions of ſin which have proved fatal to others. Without ſuch continual watchfulneſs and care, no profeſſor is ſecure from the groſſeſt enormities.

In general, They treat the Lord's table with profane contempt, whoſe lives are a contradiction to the profeſſion they make there.—They, who are careleſs in their walk, profane in their language, and diſſolute in their manners—They, who profeſs their belief of chriſtianity, but are aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt, can hear his Perſon degraded, his doctrines blaſphemed, his Spirit derided, his precepts ridiculed, with ſilence, if not with apparent approbation—They, who, inſtead of being companions of thoſe that fear God, aſſociate with the ungodly, and ſit in the ſeat of the ſcornful—who are vain and frothy in their converſation; eager in their purſuit of the world; and take mean and unjuſt methods to be rich and great—They, who are cloſe and penurious to their brethren that need and perhaps aſk their aſſiſtance—who oppreſs and extort from thoſe whoſe diſtreſſes put them in their power—who ſpeak evil of their neighbours, invent ſcandal, propagate ſlander, or take no pains to ſuppreſs it, when whiſpered round by the ill-will of others—They, who are proud, peeviſh, and paſſionate, indulge to envy, malice, and revenge—whoſe lives are among the unclean, and are guilty of chambering and wantonneſs, rioting and drunkenneſs, or any other vicious enormity; who are unfaithful

faithful to their truſt, negligent of the duties of ſocial life, and which are incumbent upon them in the particular ſtations and relations in which Divine Providence hath placed them. Such as theſe wound chriſtianity in a very tender part; their unholy lives are a ſtumbling block to others, and cauſe them to think there is nothing in that religion which the profeſſors of pay ſo little regard to. By their diſobedient lives they are likely to keep more out of the church, than their glittering profeſſion will invite into it. Such a conduct hardens men in ſin, and renders them proof againſt all the arguments which are uſed to reclaim them. They are ready to deſpiſe thoſe inſtitutions which do not purify the hearts, or correct the lives of thoſe who attend them. The table of the Lord is deſpiſed by them, becauſe they ſee bad men frequent it; and that contempt which ought to fall on theſe wicked pretenders, comes upon religion itſelf. I do not ſpeak of this as either rational or juſtifiable conduct; but I ſpeak of what is likely to be the effect, when profeſſors act contrary to their profeſſion, and walk according to the courſe of this preſent evil world; it brings reproach on the chriſtian name, and occaſions the moſt ſevere reflections on religion itſelf.

The ſubject we have been upon may very properly be applied in various ways.

Firſt, They certainly have reaſon for ſerious and very humbling reflections, who wear the chriſtian

name

name, but have by the courſe of their lives diſhonored their profeſſion and rendered the table of the Lord contemptible. We are all favored with the goſpel of Chriſt, have peculiar opportunities of coming to the knowledge of God, and underſtanding our connection with him. Privileges always infer obligation.——Some of us have made a public explicit profeſſion of chriſtianity ; we have called Chriſt Maſter and Lord, and therefore ought to obey his commands. The converſation of a chriſtian ſhould be holy, exemplary, and uniform, that he may ſet religion in an agreable light before others, and perſuade them to be chriſtians. But alas ! when we look back, how much occaſion do we find for grief, for ſhame, for repentance ! In many inſtances we have offended daily, and come ſhort of the glory of God. The beſt chriſtians, the moſt exact walkers, by no means come up to that ſtrict and perfect purity which is enjoined in the precepts of the goſpel. But are there not ſome whoſe practice hath been evidently the reverſe of what it ought to be, who have indulged to vice, and whoſe lives have been among the wicked and ungodly ? They have diſhonored God—by profaning his name —by diſregarding his inſtitutions—by their injuſtice and uncharitableneſs—by their inordinate attachment to this world—by their intemperance—their laſciviouſneſs—their unchriſtian wrath—their levity—their pride—their unſtedfaſtneſs in religion —and the inconſiſtency of their demeanor. Such

as theſe have given great occaſion to the enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme. And they too readily ſeize the occaſion which is thus unhappily given them. They reproach religion on account of the bad lives of thoſe who profeſs it. How little reaſon ſoever they have for their reproaches; how unjuſt ſoever it is to charge upon the goſpel the faults of thoſe who are condemned by it; yet, ſince it is ſo natural for men to judge of a cauſe by the character of thoſe who embrace it, how ought they to be aſhamed who have laid a foundation for ſuch prejudices! Oh! my brethren, how have we cauſed the way of truth to be evil ſpoken of by our unholy lives and wicked practices! How many have we turned from the good ways of God! Hath not our light been darkneſs? or have we not rather dazled the eyes of beholders with a mere blaze, than afforded them any real help in the way of heaven? How affecting the thought, that we have not only not done the good we might and ought to have done, but have done actual diſſervice to the cauſe of Chriſt! There have been ſo many ſpots and blemiſhes in us, as that, inſtead of being an honor to chriſtianity, we have brought diſgrace upon it—inſtead of gaining men over to religion, we have prejudiced them againſt it.

Secondly, How deteſtable the character, and how dangerous the condition of a wicked hypocritical profeſſor! "A wicked chriſtian," ſays one, "is the

the moſt unprofitable creature of any upon the face of the whole earth : He ſerves for no purpoſe but only to do hurt in the world, and of that indeed he does a great deal, much more than he could have done, if he had not been a profeſſed chriſtian. For the open ſins that he is guilty of, while he lives in the profeſſion of a pure and holy religion, are more ſcandalous and infectious than other men's ; the wickedneſs of his life caſts alſo a blemiſh and reproach on that holy religion which he profeſſes, and gives great prejudice againſt it to ſuch as were otherwiſe well diſpoſed to embrace it." Such an one, who pretends to great piety and devotion and at the ſame time leads a wicked life, is unworthy of reſpect, or even of notice, unleſs it be to expreſs our deteſtation of his impiety. One can ſcarce conceive of a more contemptible object : and he often meets with the contempt he deſerves. Good men deteſt him as an enemy to God and religion. Bad men look upon him with contempt, as aſſuming a fictitious character, and pretending to be what he knows he is not. Every one loves an honeſt man who acts agreably to his profeſſion. Every one deſpiſes an hypocritical deceiver, who ſpeaks you fair while he hath no deſign to ſerve you. They who have no religion themſelves cannot but abhor a man who puts on a form of godlineſs, and lives in vice and wickedneſs. Many abandoned ſinners are ſeized with horror, when they ſee others, as bad as themſelves, take the covenant of God into their mouths, and aſſume the character of ſaints ; or,

when

when they ſee thoſe who frequent the Lord's table running to all exceſs of riot and vice. Wicked as they are, they dare not mix religion with their crimes, or profeſs to know God while in works they impiouſly deny him.

But the contempt and reproach which hypocritical profeſſors meet with in this world is but a light matter, when compared with the abhorrence and indignation of a holy God. We read of ſome who will " awake to ſhame and everlaſting contempt." And who may more juſtly expect ſuch a reception in the great day of accounts, than they who have profeſſed the religion of Chriſt and lived in contradiction to his laws ? Our Lord ever diſcovered a peculiar diſplicency with hypocrites ; and repetedly pronounced the moſt terrible woes againſt them. Men who put on a ſhew of religion to deceive others, or to cloke their vices, that they may under this appearance practice the enormities of a vicious life, are among the moſt odious kind of ſinners. The great God will caſt them away from his preſence ; He will not admit them into heaven ; He will caſt them into outer darkneſs ; He will conſign them to the priſon of hell, and to one of the hotteſt places there. Our Lord, deſigning to repreſent the miſery to which a ſinner of the firſt magnitude would be doomed, ſays, " The Lord of that ſervant ſhall cut him aſunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites : there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth."

This

This charge of hypocrify was often brought by our Saviour againſt the ſcribes and phariſees, of whom he ſpake with unuſual ſeverity. They were not men, who had a concern for religion, and were careful to guard againſt vice and wickedneſs, but were under ſome miſtake about their internal ſtate. —They were not men, who went a great way in morality, and only wanted a holy principle. There might be ſome ſuch among them. But the men againſt whom our Saviour denounces his woes were guilty of ſcandalous immoralities.—They devoured widow's houſes, and for a pretence made long prayers.—They paid tithes of mint, aniſe, and cummin, but neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.—They made clean the outſide of the cup and the platter, but within were full of extortion and exceſs.—They were men, to whom Chriſt ſent prophets, wiſe-men and ſcribes, ſome of whom they killed and crucified, ſome they ſcourged in the ſynagogues, and others they perſecuted from city to city.—Theſe were the men, to whom our Lord ſaid, "ye ſhall receive greater damnation." The like doom will be pronounced on wicked chriſtians, on ungodly profeſſors, on hypocrites, formaliſts, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs; on apoſtates, men who once had ſome touches of religion, who ſeemed to have been enlightned, and to have taſted of the heavenly gift, and after that have fallen away into vice and profaneneſs. Theſe are the men who are condemned by their own profeſſion, who ſeal their

damnation

damnation at the Lord's ſupper, and make his table contemptible ; and not thoſe poor trembling ſouls, who have a ſerious concern about their ſalvation, and are ſeeking an intereſt inChriſt ; who are deſirous to be what they profeſs to be, and to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameleſs. Theſe latter, I ſay, are not the perſons who ſeal their own damnation at the Lord's table, even though it ſhould appear, that they were deſtitute of that principle of holineſs, which only can render them acceptable to God in their attendance on any of the inſtitutions of religion, or enſure to them a right to eternal life.

One who profanely trifles with divine ordinances is in a very incorrigible condition. By ſetting under the means of grace and not profiting by them ; by eraſing the good impreſſions which have been made upon his mind ; by a courſe of formality and hypocriſy, he becomes inſenſible of guilt, and conſcience grows quite callous. The recovery of ſuch an one is an event hardly to be expected. The common means of grace have been uſed with him already and have proved ineffectual, and if God ſhould ſee fit to go out of his common method, theſe are not the perſons who are likely to be thus favored. 'Tis true all things are poſſible to the power and grace of God, and ſome of the vileſt character have been reclaimed ; but ſuch inſtances are rare, and therefore can afford but little encouragement.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, Let not thoſe who are without indulge prejudices againſt religion on account of the bad lives of thoſe who profeſs it. It is not for want of precept that chriſtians are not more circumſpect in their walk. The goſpel enjoins the greateſt purity of heart and holineſs of life. You find no defect there. And if you want example, we can point you to one in whom all the precepts of the goſpel were perfectly exemplified, whoſe whole character was excellent, amiable, and ſpotleſs. I mean the great Author of our religion. If you meet with any defect in him, it is undoubtedly a juſt argument againſt chriſtianity. But how unreaſonable is it to find fault with the religion of Jeſus Chriſt, becauſe the lives of his diſciples are not agreable to it! to deſpiſe the table of the Lord becauſe all who come to it are not what their profeſſion obliges them to be! Condemn them you may, and ſo doth the goſpel they profeſs. You ſay it is a ſhame that men who make ſuch high pretenſions ſhould allow themſelves in deceit, injuſtice, uncharitableneſs, detraction, profaneneſs, intemperance, as theſe men do.—It is ſo—we join with you in cenſuring their evil practices. But why do you charge their crimes upon the goſpel, which enjoins truth, juſtice, charity, ſobriety, and every other virtue? —Is not chriſtianity true becauſe all men are not chriſtians?—Is our religion an impoſture becauſe ſome men who pretend to embrace it are deceitful, and are not what they pretend to be?—Is this good reaſoning?

reaſoning ?——Conſider chriſtianity as you have it in your Bibles—Was ever any thing more pure or more inviting ? But after all, your objection is founded on an entirely falſe ſuppoſition. You ſay the lives of profeſſors are not anſwerable to their profeſſion—We own it as to ſome, too many. —But ſurely you will not bring this charge againſt all—Are there not chriſtians to be found, who adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour ; and exemplify, in ſome good meaſure, the precepts of the goſpel ? whoſe light ſhines in their good works ? Why do you not, on account of theſe, glorify our Father which is in heaven ? Take heed, leſt, under a notion of teſtifying againſt the hypocriſy of ſome pretenders to religion, and becauſe you would not be like them, you contract prejudices againſt religion itſelf—againſt the only method of ſalvation which infinite wiſdom hath found out, or ever will find out ; and thus plunge yourſelves into eternal perdition.

Fourthly, Profeſſors of religion ſhould ſeriouſly conſider of how great importance it is, that they walk worthy their profeſſion. They in particular, who come to the Lord's table, ſhould be very careful they do not by their wicked lives render it contemptible. The honor of God, the credit of religion, the ſalvation of others, as well as your own eternal welfare are very greatly concerned in your converſation. Every irregularity of your's does hurt

hurt to the cauſe of Chriſt; and you cannot ſo effectually injure him, as by a viſible contempt of his laws. Whereas, if you live as his goſpel teaches, you will have the comfort in your own breaſts—you will honor God—you will be uſeful to the world—and you will do the greateſt kindneſs to mankind. "Brethren, if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth a ſinner from the error of his way, ſhall ſave a ſoul from death, and ſhall hide a multitude of ſins." What a mighty incentive! How muſt every one feel the force of this motive, who hath the leaſt degree of that benevolence which chriſtianity ever recommends, and of which our Lord ſet us ſo amiable an example! How ſhould ſuch conſiderations influence chriſtians to walk with the greateſt circumſpection and care, not as fools but as wiſe; to guard their lips, to take heed to their ſteps, that they may not give any juſt ground of offence to any, but may cut off occaſion from thoſe that deſire occaſion; and that they who have taken ſo cruel and malicious a part may be aſhamed, having no evil thing to ſay of them. Great jealouſy and watchfulneſs become us while we are in this preſent evil world, where we are ſurrounded with temptations, and expoſed to continual dangers. And as an upright heart is the beſt foundation of a chriſtian life, let us look to God to create us anew in Chriſt Jeſus to good works, that we may walk in them. And after we are thus be-

come his workmanſhip, let us not think we have apprehended, or that we are already perfect, but forgetting the things that are behind, let us reach to thoſe that are before, preſſing onward towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.

It is worthy particular attention, that though true grace cannot be loſt, the appearance of it may. One who is truly regenerate will not miſs of heaven, he is not therefore out of danger.—He may ſin—He may diſhonor God—and prejudice others againſt religion. This ſhould make a good man exceeding cautious. But a meer profeſſor of chriſtianity, even one who hath been brought near to the kingdom of God, may be left to total apoſtacy —may become a monſter of impiety and wickedneſs. Guard, my brethren, againſt every tendency to ſuch a ſtate. You may, by a wicked life, "ſay the table of the Lord is contemptible," you may lead others to think it ſo, but the contempt will in the end return upon yourſelf. Your hypocriſy will expoſe you to the ſcorn of men, it will make you abhorred by God, it will encreaſe your guilt, and dreadfully aggravate your future miſery.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

Practical Obſervations on the Hiſtory of Judas and his tragical End.

MAT. XXVII. 3, 4, 5.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he ſaw that he was condemned, repented himſelf, and brought again the thirty pieces of ſilver to the chief prieſts and elders, ſaying, I have ſinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they ſaid, What is that to us? ſee thou to that. And he caſt down the pieces of ſilver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himſelf.

THE man, whoſe unhappy end is recorded in theſe words, had been one of the diſtinguiſhed followers of our Lord. He was early called to be a diſciple; was one of the twelve whom Jeſus choſe

chose to be his apostles, and whom he sent forth to publish the glad tidings of the kingdom.

My design is, To give you some account of Judas, the person whose agonies of despair and horror are exhibited in the text—And to lead you to some suitable reflections on the subject.

We are not told when this unhappy man began to follow Jesus, nor what were his original motives. —He might be convinced, by the miracles our Lord wrought, that he was the Messiah so long expected, and might feel some emotions of heart under his preaching. The wickedness and treachery he was afterward guilty of do not prove that he was hypocritical in his profession of regard to Jesus at first: Many believed the truth of our Lord's mission, and were his professed disciples, who never felt the effectual power of religion on their hearts, and therefore in a time of trial fell away.— Possibly, Judas had bad views from the beginning. There had been a general expectation of the Messiah among the Jews: It is very plain but few of them thought of a spiritual kingdom: By far the most looked for a temporal Saviour, who would deliver them from the Roman power, and subjugate all nations to the Jews. This seems to have been the expectation of our Lord's own disciples. He checked their ambitious spirit when it discovered itself, and assured them that his kingdom was not

not of this world; and yet, even after his resurrection, they inquired of him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" It was not till the Spirit was poured out from on high, that they fully understood the design of his mission, and the nature of his kingdom. If the other disciples, who were men of honest minds, had such worldly and ambitious thot's, it may easily be supposed that Judas had; that he fixed his mind wholly upon the illustrious appearance our Lord was to make, formed pleasing imaginations of the state of dignity to which he should be advanced, and the large opportunities he should have of gratifying his avarice, which seems to have been the ruling passion; and that these were the views he had in becoming a follower and disciple of Jesus. But whether Judas had sinister intentions or not in his first professions, we are soon made acquainted with the badness of his heart, though he still appeared to adhere to his Master, and ventured to take on him the character of an apostle.

The first time we find him mentioned is, when our Lord constituted his twelve apostles, of whom Judas was one. ¶ It seems surprizing at first tho't, that our Lord, who undoubtedly knew what was in man, and who said of Judas † "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil," should invest such a wretch with so sacred a character. But if we examine the matter a little more closely, we

¶ Mark 3. 19. † John 6. 70.

we ſhall find, that he acted in this, as in every thing elſe, becoming the wiſdom of God.

In the firſt place, By this the prophecies were fulfilled. There are ſeveral paſſages in the Pſalms which the apoſtle Peter expreſsly applied to Judas, ‡ "Men and brethren, this ſcripture muſt needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghoſt by the mouth of David ſpake before concerning Judas—for it is written in the book of Pſalms, Let his habitation be deſolate and let no man dwell therein, and his office let another take." Theſe words could not have been ſo remarkably fulfilled in Judas, if he had not been called to be an apoſtle.

Again, By our Lord's calling one to be among his choſen twelve, who afterwards turned out a traitor, we are furniſhed with a very ſtrong argument, that there was no ſecret ſcheme carried on between him and his followers. If there was, Judas muſt have known it, and had he known any colluſion, he would undoubtedly have diſcovered it, and there had been no cauſe of that remorſe of which our text gives an account.

Once more, This inſtance of Judas, choſen to be an apoſtle and becoming ſuch a prodigy of wickedneſs, teaches us not to be ſurprized, if ſome among the profeſſed diſciples of Chriſt contradict their profeſſion, and apoſtatize from his religion. At

‡ Acts 1. 16, 20.

At the ſame time, his deſpair and the tragical effect of it afford a ſolemn warning to all, to avoid every approach to his crime.

When our Lord ordained his twelve apoſtles, he "gave them" (Judas among the reſt) "power over unclean ſpirits to caſt them out, and to heal all manner of ſickneſs and all manner of diſeaſe." § This man, ſo abandoned, was employed "to preach the kingdom of God," and had power of working miracles. He was raiſed to a ſtation of the higheſt dignity and importance in the diſpenſation which Chriſt came to introduce, though under the government of the moſt ſordid paſſions.—Even the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were not an evidence of a ſanctified heart. "Many will ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have caſt out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity." ‖ One would be inclined to think, that ſuch ſtriking proofs of divine power would have influenced the hardeſt heart; that no one could have uſed the name of Jeſus in ſuch an authoritative manner, and ſeen ſuch wonderful effects accompanying this uſe of it, without heartily ſubmitting to him as Lord and Chriſt. But we ſee Judas caſting out devils, who was himſelf a ſervant of the prince of darkneſs. We ſee him uſing the name of Chriſt with the authority of an apoſtle,

§ Mat. 10. 1. ‖ Mat. 7. 21, 22, 23. and

and publishing the glad tidings of peace, while at the same time he was a stranger to the glory of his character as Mediator between God and man, and had never felt the power of that religion he preached. Some are ready to imagine, that they who have superior knowlege and gifts, especially, if their station in life calls them to study and speak of the excellencies of Christ and the glory of his kingdom, and to be conversant with the gospel which gives such an amiable view of him, must make great attainments in religion; that they have no difficulties, no struggles, no temptations which can at all endanger them; that they are always in a serious devout frame, always thinking of God, and of those subjects that tend to prepare them for the eternal world. But they have in this quite wrong apprehensions of things, and much too high an opinion of the privileges which these men enjoy. It is true, they have peculiar advantages, but these are only means, and the end is far from being necessarily connected with the means. No dignity of office in the church of Christ, no acquaintance with the truths of religion which arises from study and conversation, can secure us from sin, or from the awful doom of hypocrites. Many not only profess to know God, but do really know much of his nature and his works in speculation; they have great understanding in the scriptures, can discourse with propriety and judgment on the doctrines and duties of our holy religion, and deliver themselves with such life and energy, as to warm the hearts

and

and edify the minds of true chriſtians, and yet know nothing as they ought to know, have no practical acquaintance with the truths of religion. They may be wiſe men after the fleſh, and yet not be wiſe unto ſalvation. Theſe conſiderations may ſerve to correct the ſentiments of thoſe, who have the perſons of any in admiration, and form too high an opinion of men weak and imperfect as themſelves. They are certainly very proper for the ſerious contemplation of thoſe, who are employed in ſtudying and diſcourſing on the great and important truths of chriſtianity. But it is very unjuſt and unreaſonable, becauſe this may be the caſe, and ſometimes hath been, to infer that it always is; or to argue that there is nothing in religion, becauſe ſome profeſſors are not what they pretend to be. It is hard to cenſure all as hypocrites who call Jeſus Maſter and Lord, becauſe ſome are; or to pronounce all who preach in the name of Chriſt ſtrangers to him, becauſe he will ſay to ſome who have been engaged in this imployment, "I never knew you." None have a right to "cenſure or condemn whole bodies of men for the faults of particular members." Methinks the inſtance of Judas, taken in it's connection with the ſincerity of the other apoſtles, ſhould rather lead to a more charitable concluſion. Of twelve, whom Chriſt called to be his ſelect followers, one only proved falſe-hearted; eleven were honeſt in their profeſſions of regard to him; and though theſe had their weakneſſes and their faults, which were eſpecially viſible at the

time of his laſt ſufferings and death, yet their hearts were upright before God, and they were, in the end, glorious inſtruments of ſpreading his goſpel through the world. Timid and irreſolute as they were at firſt; they afterwards, with a noble fortitude, endured the greateſt hardſhips and ſufferings in the cauſe of their Maſter, and counted not their very lives dear when called to reſign them for his ſake.

We find mention made of Judas at another time, † When "many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then ſaid Jeſus unto the twelve, will ye alſo go away? Then Simon Peter anſwered him," in the name of the reſt, "Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life. And we believe and are ſure, that Thou art that Chriſt, the Son of the living God." In theſe words Peter uttered the ſentiments of his heart; and, as he ſuppoſed, the ſentiments of all the reſt: For Judas had carried himſelf with ſuch decency and propriety, that there ſeems to have been no ſuſpicion of his inſincerity among the other diſciples. But our Lord, who could not be deceived by any ſpecious pretences, knew the hypocriſy of his heart. "Jeſus anſwered them, have not I choſen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." Our Lord did not ſpecify the wretch of whom he ſpake with ſuch unuſual aſperity, that they might all be jealous of themſelves, and might

† John 6. 66—71.

might ſuppreſs every tendency to ſuch baſeneſs and ingratitude. But the Evangeliſt tells us, "He ſpake of Judas Iſcariot the ſon of Simon, for he it was that ſhould betray him, being one of the twelve." Some ſuppoſe that Judas, finding, by our Lord's preceding diſcourſe, that there would be nothing in his kingdom to gratify his carnal and ambitious views, now firſt entertained the thought of betraying him. If this was the caſe, it ſhows the badneſs of his heart, that ſo plain a proof of Chriſt's acquaintance with his ſecret thoughts and purpoſes did not alarm him, and deter him from proceeding further. It ſeems it did not. But ſurely it is a conſideration which ought to awaken the mind of every hypocritical and falſe profeſſor, that Jeſus Chriſt knows the thoughts and intents of his heart. You may poſſibly preſerve your reputation in the world, you may anſwer ſome ſiniſter ends which you have in view; though this is not certain; Judas, as we find in the ſequel, did not ſucceed in his worldly deſigns, he was detected and expoſed. But if you ſhould go on without diſcovery to the end of life, yet what will it avail when you ſtand before your Judge? Then the thoughts of your heart will be laid open; and you will appear, what you would not now on any account be thought, a deceiver and an hypocrite. Let me beſeech you to prevent ſuch an ignominious diſcovery by repentance. Become honeſtly that good man and real chriſtian, which you would have the world think

you

you are. This is the only way to have peace in your own mind—to appear with confidence before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt—and to eſcape the wrath to come.

This diſcourſe of our Lord is ſuppoſed to be more than a year before his crucifixion. So that the crime of Judas appears to have been a very deliberate act.—It was not a tho't which only paſſed thro' his mind, as good men have ſometimes horrid ſuggeſtions, which, if immediately rejected, are not charged upon them as crimes.—It was not the effect of a ſudden temptation, by which men are ſometimes ſurprized into an action they abhor.—It was long premeditated.—Our Saviour gave him warning from time to time, but he did not attend to it. He retained the appearance of a diſciple with a deſign to betray his Lord; and under the maſk of friendſhip concealed the moſt cruel intentions.—How carefully ſhould we guard againſt the firſt motions of ſin, and ſuppreſs evil thoughts as ſoon as they begin to riſe! Had Judas attended to our Lord's admonition, rejected the horrid ſuggeſtion when he firſt perceived it, and ſought divine grace to overcome the temptation with which he was aſſaulted, he had not been that prodigy of wickedneſs he afterwards proved. But, unhappy man! he did not oppoſe the wicked thoughts which Satan put into his heart—he gave way to them—he indulged them. Poſſibly, there were

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ſome feeble efforts. Conſcience might be ſometimes alarmed under the preaching of his Lord, and by the repeated admonitions which Chriſt gave him. Perhaps it was owing to this, that he did not attempt to perpetrate his perfidious deſign ſooner. But he returned to his wicked meditations—pleaſed himſelf with the advantages he hoped to gain—His tenderneſs of mind gradually wore off—The Spirit of God forſook him—Satan took full poſſeſſion of him—and he could, without horror, think of the blackeſt crime that ever was acted under the ſun.——Take warning, you who have been hitherto under reſtraints, but find evil thoughts frequently coming into your mind; eſpecially, if you are tempted to ſin, and begin to be inclined to liſten to the temptation: You are in awful danger of the greateſt crimes. One who ſuffers his thoughts to run upon forbidden objects is not likely to keep long from wicked actions. Oppoſe therefore theſe beginnings of vice. Reſiſt the tempter and he will flee from you. Maintain a conſtant ſenſe of the being, perfections, and government of God—of your obligations to holineſs—and the danger of ſin. There is no ſo effectual a way to keep out bad thoughts, as to keep your minds continually ſtored with thoſe that are good. If you have been led aſtray by the tempter, engage in the work of repentance, before you loſe your tenderneſs of mind—before you are given up to your own imaginations, and are left to commit all iniquity with greedineſs.

"Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots, then may ye alſo do good, who are accuſtomed to do evil."

The next place in which Judas is mentioned, is John 12. 3. We are told, "Then took Mary a pound of ointment, of ſpikenard very coſtly, and anointed the feet of Jeſus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the houſe was filled with the odor of the ointment." Who would not have ſuppoſed, that ſuch an inſtance of zeal and reſpect would have met with the approbation of all, but to be ſure of the diſciples of Chriſt? that they would have applauded this generous expreſſion of her gratitude and affection? Or if they could not approve the expence which Mary put herſelf to, yet ſo long as their Maſter was ſilent, and did not find fault, who had given ſo many inſtances of his wiſdom and attention to the conduct of his followers, we might reaſonably expect, they would not object or murmur; and it ſeems, moſt of them were poſſeſſed of ſo much modeſty as not to expreſs any diſſatisfaction. Matthew indeed tells us, "When his diſciples ſaw it they had indignation." Mark ſays, "They had indignation in themſelves." But we may with reaſon ſuppoſe, that the plural is, in theſe evangeliſts, put by a uſual figure for the ſingular; this is the more probable, as the ſpeech, which the diſciples are ſaid to make, is expreſly ſaid by John to be made by Judas. However it was with the other

diſciples,

diſciples, he could not ſuppreſs his malignant ſentiments, nor keep from uttering his diſcontent. As we are told in the 4th verſe, " Then ſaith one of his diſciples, Judas Iſcariot, Simon's ſon, which ſhould betray him, why was not this ointment ſold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor ?" Had his heart been warmed with love to Chriſt, he would not have thought that a waſte which was beſtowed on him. A regard to the poor is a matter of great importance, but it is not to ſwallow up every other conſideration. Every duty is to be attended in its proper place.——Some men think all religion conſiſts in piety and devotion, and have no concern about good works.—Others imagine, that if they abound in acts of charity, this will atone for their neglect of other duties, that charity will cover a multitude of ſins, even though they impenitently perſiſt in them.—Both are wrong.—No pretences of regard to God can be ſincere, where they are not accompanied with love to our brethren. Nor can any acts of liberality meet with the Divine acceptance, unleſs they flow from love to him, who, as he is the greateſt and beſt of beings, deſerves our ſupreme regard. A man may give all his goods to feed the poor and not have charity.

But the emotion of Judas did not proceed from his tenderneſs for the poor, it was the effect of a ſordid avaricious temper. " This he ſaid, not that he cared for the poor, but becauſe he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." As he

was

was now meditating a desertion of our Lord, it grieved him that he missed so fine an opportunity of gain.——How ready are men to miscall their conduct! and with what false pretences do they endeavor to deceive the world! Judas would fain conceal his avarice by pretending tenderness for the poor, which is a most amiable and useful disposition. So others will call their niggardly contracted spirit, prudence, œconomy, or any thing but what it is. Who doth not detest the hypocrisy of Judas, who professed a concern for the poor, while he only meant, by the most infamous robbery, to enrich himself? I cannot well omit the note of the pious Mr. Henry on this passage. "They," says he, "to whom the management and disposal of public money is committed, have need to be governed by steady principles of justice and honesty, that no blot cleave to their hands, for though some make a jest of cheating the government, or the church, or the country, if cheating be thieving, and communities being more considerable than particular persons, if robbing them be the greater sin, the guilt of theft and the portion of thieves will be no jesting matter. Judas that had betrayed his trust soon after betrayed his Master." He who pretended such a vast regard to the poor was, a few days after, contriving a scheme of the most horrid cruelty and perfidy to his great Lord and kind benefactor.

We

We have the account Luke 22, beginning. "Now the feaſt of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the paſſover, and the chief prieſts and ſcribes ſought how they might kill him, for they feared the people." The ſolemnity of the ſeaſon and the ſacred ſervices in which they were employed had no influence to reſtrain them from their wicked deſigns. They held their conclave in the houſe of Caiaphas the high-prieſt, and there conſulted how they might take Jeſus by ſome artifice, as they were apprehenſive of the people, who retained a reverence for one who had appeared in the character of a prophet, and to whom God had borne witneſs by ſuch a ſeries of miracles.

"Then entered Satan into Judas ſirnamed Iſcariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief prieſts and captains, how he might betray him unto them, and they were glad and covenanted to give him money." v. 3, 4, 5. Matthew tells us, he made the propoſal himſelf; "ſaying, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? and they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of ſilver." Covetouſneſs ſeems to have been the great ſpring of Judas's conduct. The love of money is the root of all evil. This puſhed this miſerable man on to his ruin. How ought every one to guard againſt this ſordid—this unworthy paſſion—which hath brought many others beſides Judas to laſting ſhame and perdition. View the world as it is, in-

capable of yielding you reſt; guard againſt it's ſnares; and maintain a generous, a chriſtian contempt of it. Think, how great, how good, how all-perfect Jehovah is, who reveals himſelf to you in the goſpel! This God is your's, or he may be your's. How ſatisfying the reſt! how tranſporting the joy which chriſtianity affords! it begins here, but its duration hath no period. And will you, for any thing this world can afford, conſent to miſs this great—this inconceivable happineſs? Alas! to the diſgrace of human nature, multitudes have preferred the moſt trifling vanities to this infinite good.

Covetous as Judas was, yet he contracted with the prieſts for a very ſmall ſum. Providence ſo ordered it, that they ſhould propoſe, and that he ſhould accept juſt thirty pieces of ſilver, in order to the accompliſhment of Zechariah's prophecy in which this ſum was ſpecified. † The fixing this particular ſum might be deſigned by the Jewiſh rulers as an expreſſion of their contempt of our Lord, it being the price at which a ſlave was ſet by the Jewiſh law. § "A ſlave," as one obſerves, "was rated by the law at thirty ſhekels of ſilver, which, if we reckon them at half a crown, which was ſomething more than their real value, amounted to no more than three pounds fifteen ſhillings of our money; a goodly price that he was prized at of them."—What a ſtoop was it in our bleſſed Lord to ſubmit to this indignity and contempt! Such was his love to mankind! ſuch was his deſire to promote their beſt good!

† Zech. 11. 12. § Exod. 21. 32. "And

" And he promiſed, and ſought opportunity to betray him unto them in the abſence of the multitude." He not only engaged, but he was ſteady to a contract which he ought to have broke, with deteſtation and abhorrence of his wickedneſs in making it. We never can, by any engagement of ours, make it right to do a thing that is in itſelf ſinful. But it ſeems Judas was quite determined. We hear of no remorſe—no heſitation. He ſought to deliver him in the abſence of the multitude. He knew his Lord's practice of retiring; and as He uſually permitted the twelve to be with him, Judas knew the place of his retirement; there he propoſed to ſeize him, as it might be effected without danger of a tumult.—How criminal is it to abuſe the confidence of our friends and benefactors, and to betray them at thoſe times, when they, generouſly relying on our honeſty and fidelity, commit themſelves to us. This aggravates guilt, and is to add treachery to baſeneſs and ingratitude.

The next paſſage we are called to take notice of is, Mat. 26. 21. While Jeſus was eating the paſchal ſupper with his diſciples, " he ſaid, verily I ſay unto you, that one of you ſhall betray me." Our Lord made this declaration with a friendly deſign of alarming Judas; and, if poſſible, reclaiming him from his horrid purpoſe. He had in view alſo, by diſcovering his knowlege of this act of perfidy before it took place, to confirm the faith of his other diſciples, which ſuch an event was ſo likely to ſtagger. " Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to paſs, ye may believe that I

am

am he." * "And they were exceeding ſorrowful, and began every one of them to ſay unto him, Lord, is it I?" v. 22. The declaration of Jeſus filled his diſciples with ſurprize and grief. A variety of melancholy reflections crowded into their minds. It was a thought they knew not how to bear, that their Maſter was to be taken from their head; to be told that he was to be betrayed and become a victim to treachery and wickedneſs was an aggravation of their uneaſineſs; to hear that the perfidy was to be from among them, while no one was ſingled out as the traitor, compleated their diſtreſs. They could not entertain any doubt whether Chriſt ſpake the words of truth and ſoberneſs—they had no reaſon to ſuſpect their fellow diſciples—they knew each one more againſt himſelf than againſt any of their brethren—and their averſion to the crime made them the more afraid leſt they ſhould be left to commit it. "They began" therefore "to ſay unto him one by one, is it I?" My heart, Lord, feels an abhorrence of the crime thou haſt predicted, and I cannot entertain a thought of committing it; but when I hear thee declaring, that one of us ſhall betray thee, I tremble at the apprehenſion of being that one.—It is an excellent ſpirit which theſe diſciples diſcovered;—What charity were they poſſeſſed of towards one another!—What a ſenſe had they of the corruption and treachery of their own hearts, that they ſhould think it poſſible for them to commit a crime, of which they could not feel the leaſt traces within them; but which they held in the greateſt deteſtation!—How becoming is ſuch

* John 13. 19.

diffidence

diffidence in creatures weak and ſinful as we are! —At the ſame time one cannot help being ſurprized, that Judas, who was capable of ſuch impiety and ingratitude, ſhould have had the art to behave ſo, as that, on ſuch a declaration, every one of the diſciples ſhould ſuſpect himſelf rather than him.

"And he anſwered and ſaid, he that dippeth his hand with me in the diſh, the ſame ſhall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him, but wo unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed." v. 23, 24. Dr. Doddridge hath the following note on theſe words, "As this paſſage is not liable to the ambiguities, which ſome have apprehended in Acts 2. 23. and 4. 28. (which yet ſeem on the whole to be parallel to it in their moſt natural conſtruction) I look upon it as an evident proof, that thoſe things are in the language of ſcripture ſaid to be determined, or decreed, (or exactly bounded and marked out by God, as the word moſt naturally ſignifies) which he ſees will in fact happen, in conſequence of his volitions without any neceſſitating agency; as well as thoſe events, of which he is properly the author: (and as Beza well expreſſes it, qui ſequitur Deum, emendate ſane loquitur, we need not fear falling into any impropriety of ſpeech, when we uſe the language which God has taught:) I ſay, without any neceſſitating agency, becauſe I apprehend that this text, among many others, muſt entirely overthrow the ſcheme, which ſome laborioufly endeavor to eſtabliſh, That where God foreſees an event, he always determines to render it neceſſary,

ceſſary, and ſo to ſuſpend the moral agency and accountableneſs of the creature concerned in it. Were this the caſe, nothing could be more unjuſt, than to foretell puniſhments to be inflicted for ſuch actions; which is plainly the caſe here, and indeed in moſt other places where evil actions are foretold." It would be unfit to threaten puniſhments, which it would be unjuſt to execute; to puniſh men for actions of which they are not the authors would be unjuſt; and therefore it would be impiety to aſſert this of the bleſſed God.

Matthew goes on, "Then Judas which betrayed him, ſaid, Maſter, Is it I?" v. 25. He was the laſt that put the queſtion: He put it now, not becauſe he had any doubt whom Jeſus intended, but leſt his fellow-diſciples ſhould interpret his ſilence as a confeſſion of guilt, and hoping that our Lord would conceal him as he had hitherto done. "He," (that is Jeſus) "ſaid unto him, thou haſt ſaid." Which was the ſame thing as if he had directly told him, thou art the man. All this did not awaken this hardened ſinner. On the contrary, he became more furiouſly ſet upon the deſtruction of his Maſter. "After the ſop," which ſeems to have been given as a private intimation to John, "Satan entered into him." He took more full poſſeſſion of him. "Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, that thou doeſt, do quickly." † Our Lord knew he had a baptiſm to be baptized with, and he was ſtraitned till it was accompliſhed. He knew the time was now come, in which it was determined he ſhould enter on his ſufferings, and he earneſtly

† John 13. 27.

earneſtly deſired to meet them, however contrary they were in themſelves to his innocent nature. He knew, that after death, he ſhould go to his Father and enjoy the glory he had with him before the world was, and he looked forward with joy to the time of his departure.——How happy they, who like their Maſter are always ready for ſufferings, and can rejoice at the approach of the king of terrors ! This ſhould be our deſire and endeavor. To this end we ſhould improve ordinances and providences. Death cannot be far off, it may be near. Let us work while the day laſts, the night cometh wherein no man can work.

" Now no man at the table knew for what intent he ſpake this to him. For ſome of them tho't becauſe Judas had the bag, that Jeſus had ſaid unto him, buy thoſe things that we have need of againſt the feaſt ; or that he ſhould give ſomething to the poor."—How much candor is diſcovered by the apoſtles ! Being innocent themſelves, they were not diſpoſed to think others guilty, and were ready to put any conſtruction on the conduct of Judas, and what our Lord ſaid to him, than that, which if true, muſt lead them to give up their fellow-diſciple.—How amiable ſuch a temper ! how engaging ſuch miſtakes ! how much better than a diſpoſition to cenſure, revile, and condemn all, whom our narrow minds incline us to think the foes of God ! May we ever have that charity which hopeth all things, which believeth all things, even tho' it may lead us ſometimes to embrace thoſe, who will in the end turn out hypocrites and traitors ! " He

"He then having received the sop, went immediately out, and it was night." Not all the warnings our Lord gave Judas had the least effect, unless to encrease his rage; there appears no sign of repentance—no deliberation—no delay—As soon as he found he could conceal himself no longer, and perhaps finding the hour agreed upon by the Jews was at hand, he went out to accomplish his cruel and wicked purpose.

While Judas was gone to deliver him into the hands of sinners, Jesus, with a more than philosophic calmness, went on to give his other disciples such instructions and warnings, as he found necessary to prepare their minds for the approaching great and solemn events. At the very time, when his enemies were about to execute the scheme they had been so long contriving, and his last and most amazing sufferings were just at hand, this compassionate Saviour, ever mindful of his great errand, instituted the holy eucharist to be a memorial of his death. He as it were forgat his own sorrows to promote the good of his church. "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread." Surely this is a circumstance which must have great weight with every ingenuous mind. With what readiness ought we to obey the command of our dying Saviour, who hath loved us and given himself for us, and who never could command any thing but what is agreable to the highest reason! To him be glory for ever—AMEN.

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

Practical Obſervations on the Hiſtory of Judas and his tragical End.

MAT. XXVII. 3, 4, 5.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he ſaw that he was condemned, repented himſelf, and brought again the thirty pieces of ſilver to the chief prieſts and elders, ſaying, I have ſinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they ſaid, What is that to us? ſee thou to that. And he caſt down the pieces of ſilver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himſelf.

THE ſolemn warnings and admonitions our Lord had given to Judas, as we have obſerved once and again, ſerved rather to confirm him in his wicked purpoſe, than to produce any remorſe

in his breaſt. Finding that his treachery was known to his Maſter; and fearing that he ſhould be expoſed to his fellow-apoſtles; he as it were took Jeſus at his word, who had ſaid, "what thou doeſt, do quickly." He went out, to concert with the chief prieſts the immediate execution of that black and horrid crime he had undertaken to perpetrate. He went out, to betray his Maſter, of whoſe divine miſſion he could have no reaſonable doubt, and of whoſe perfect character he had himſelf been witneſs. ——Jeſus alſo ſoon went out, to enter on his ſufferings, and to meet his betrayer. He retired to Gethſemane—there he paſſed thro' his diſtreſſing agony—there he had his bloody ſweat—there his ſoul was exceeding ſorrowful, even unto death. Having again given notice to his diſciples of the near approach of their perfidious companion, he went forth, with a noble fortitude, to ſhew himſelf to the band that was ſent to ſeize him. "Riſe up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. And immediately, while he yet ſpake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with ſwords and ſtaves, from the chief prieſts, and the ſcribes, and the elders." ¶ St. John ſays, "Judas alſo which betrayed him, knew the place; for Jeſus oft-times reſorted thither with his diſciples." ‖ There was, probably, at Gethſemane, ſome oratory, to which our Lord had been wont to retire after his public labors, in a more private manner to inſtruct his diſciples, and to commit himſelf and them

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¶ Mark 14. 42, 43. ‖ John 18. 2.

to his Father in heaven. If ſo, no wonder Judas knew the place, who had ſo often been preſent with his Maſter at theſe ſacred exerciſes. But it is truly aſtoniſhing, that the recollection of thoſe tender ſcenes, in which our Lord had diſcovered ſo much regard to the human race and ſuch a particular concern for his diſciples, did not affect the mind of the traitor, and bring him to a pauſe. But we have no account of any thing like this: He had ſold himſelf to do iniquity, and he was faithful to his infamous truſt. To prevent any reſcue, he took a company of ſoldiers, who were joined by a multitude made up of perſons of all ranks and orders, compleatly armed, and determined to ſecure Jeſus.

" And he that betrayed him, had given them a token, ſaying, whomſoever I ſhall kiſs, that ſame is he; take him and lead him away ſafely. And as ſoon as he was come, he goeth ſtraitway to him, and ſaith, Maſter, Maſter, and kiſſed him." † Kiſſing was the uſual mode of ſalutation among the Jews, as among ſome other nations. " It is probable," as hath been frequently obſerved by commentators, " that our Lord in great condeſcenſion had permitted his diſciples thus to ſalute him, when they returned to him after having been any time abſent." Agreably, Judas, as ſoon as he ſaw his Lord, drew near to him with a ſhew of the greateſt reſpect, as if he rejoiced to ſee him, and ſaid, Maſter,

† Mark 14. 44, 45.

Maſter, Maſter, and kiſſed him. Poſſibly, Judas perſuaded himſelf that he could conceal his perfidy by this artifice, if not from Jeſus, yet from his followers. He knew that he had been guilty of great diſhoneſty and wickedneſs while he had been their companion, and yet had been able to preſerve his character, ſo that no ſuſpicion had fallen upon him; and he had ſome hope that he might yet remain undiſcovered. Such a hope was, indeed, groundleſs and unreaſonable, after what had paſſed; but this doth not make it certain that he did not entertain it. It is no unuſual thing for wicked men to argue abſurdly, as well as to act fooliſhly. Luſt and paſſion keep the nobler powers of the ſoul in an ignoble ſervitude; and hurry them on to a conduct as contrary to reaſon as it is to intereſt, which is not only unfit in itſelf, but tends to their certain ruin. It's dangerous tendency is evident to every one but themſelves, who are moſt concerned to obſerve it; and the reaſon they do not ſee it, is becauſe their fooliſh heart is darkened.

Our Lord well knew the treachery of Judas's heart, notwithſtanding his pretended friendſhip and reſpect; and with a mixture of tenderneſs and indignation, Jeſus ſaid unto him, "Judas, betrayeſt thou the Son of man with a kiſs?" § There is ſomething inimitably fine and expreſſive in this anſwer. It ſhows that our Lord knew the man, and ſaw through his deceit. He calls him by name, and

§ Luke 22. 48.

and expoſes his hypocriſy, treachery, and folly. Judas!—It is in vain to attempt to conceal your perfidy and ingratitude—You know that I am the Son of man—not only your Maſter and Lord, who have been loading you with favors, and to whom you have profeſſed the warmeſt affection—but the promiſed Meſſiah, the King of Iſrael.—You have ſufficient evidence that I juſtly claim theſe exalted titles—and yet, forgetting both your character and mine, you are come baſely to betray me into the hands of thoſe who have been long waiting for an opportunity to put an end to my life, and to overthrow the benevolent deſign upon which I came into the world.—Is not this crime attended with ſufficient aggravations?—Why doſt thou as it were ſtrive to accumulate guilt, by adding hypocriſy to ingratitude, and inſolence to treachery?—Know, unhappy man, that I penetrate your dark deſigns; that I am acquainted with your ſecret tranſactions; and am aware of the errand upon which you are come; and therefore cannot return your inſidious ſalutation, nor own thee as a diſciple; but muſt, from this time, conſider thee as an enemy and a traitor.

It doth not appear, that our Lord deſigned to take any particular notice of Judas, till he attempted to accoſt him as a friend: Perhaps he would have treated him with ſilent contempt, and have left him to the horrors of his own mind. But the air of reſpect and affection the traitor put on vexed his righteous

righteous ſoul, who never felt the leaſt motion within him contrary to the moſt perfect ſincerity. It filled him with holy indignation. Ill-treatment is hard to be borne from any perſon, or at any time: It is hardeſt of all when it comes from thoſe who have pretended reſpect and friendſhip, to whom we have ſhewed kindneſs and affection, and from whom we expected anſwerable returns. It was this gave an edge to David's ſorrow, "For it was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me, that did magnify himſelf againſt me, then I would have hid myſelf from him. But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took ſweet counſel together, and walked to the houſe of God in company." † We cannot wonder then, that our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who had all the feelings of humanity, and the ſtrongeſt averſion to every thing of moral evil, had the treachery and wickedneſs of this baſe diſſembler in the higheſt deteſtation.

Judas made no return to this ſevere repulſe—He was not capable of replying—guilt ſtruck him dumb—He had not a heart to repent—and bold and wicked as he was, he had not the hardineſs to mix with the diſciples of Chriſt—He therefore ſhrunk into the enemies' ranks, and ſilently accompanied them in their execrable undertaking.—How this unhappy man diſpoſed of himſelf afterwards, or what thoughts agitated his mind, while Jeſus

† Pſalm 55. 12, 13.

Jeſus was before the council, we are not told.—Probably, he was in ſome private corner about the court, anxiouſly expecting the event.

The next account we have of him is in the words I read to you at the beginning of this diſcourſe. "Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he ſaw that he was condemned, repented himſelf, and brought again the thirty pieces of ſilver to the chief prieſts and elders." Expoſitors are not agreed at what time Judas had this interview with the prieſts and elders. Some, ſuppoſing that Matthew obſerves the order of time, fix upon that interval, when Jeſus, being condemned by the great council, was led away to Pilate. § "But after this," ſays Dr. Doddridge, "the Jews were ſo intent on perſuading Pilate to conſent to his death, that there was hardly time for the Sanhedrim's adjourning to the temple, where this occurrence happened, before they had prevailed with Pilate to condemn him." He places this account of Judas at the time, when Jeſus was condemned by the Roman Governor, when orders were given for his crucifixion, and they were actually leading him to the place of execution.

Till this time, Judas might have flattered himſelf, that Chriſt would deliver himſelf; either that he would ſtrike ſome ſignal blow upon his enemies, or

§ Vid. Grotius and Dr. Guyſe in Loc.

or that he would escape from them by miracle, as he had done once and again; and so he should secure his money, and his Master receive no injury. But when he saw him condemned, and meekly submitting to the power of those who had him in their hands, a multitude of distracting thoughts crowded into his mind. He recollected what Christ had spoken of his death; and when Pilate sentenced him to be crucified, he could not but remember our Lord's frequent intimations that he should suffer that kind of death.—Now, his guilt appeared before him with all the black and horrid circumstances which attended it. He had betrayed his Master—his friend—his guide—his benefactor—one who had followed him with the kindest admonitions and most useful instructions—a prophet, yea and more than a prophet, the Saviour and Redeemer of men—He had put a stop to all his benevolent designs and gracious operations, and caused him to be treated as a criminal of the worst class. At the same time, Judas would naturally call to mind the dreadful doom which Christ had denounced against him, if he perpetrated the horrid crime he had just been guilty of. Instead of those high ambitious thoughts which he formerly entertained, of being one of the first in Christ's kingdom; he saw himself lost—undone—reserved and destined to eternal woe—without one glimmer of hope, or the most distant prospect of relief. Full of distress, horror, and despair, he repented of what he had done.—

done.—He repented, not with true godly ſorrow, but with a gloomy furious remorſe which only plunged him deeper into ruin. However, as the firſt effort to get eaſe, he carried back the wages of unrighteouſneſs which he had received. The thirty pieces of ſilver for which he had ſold his Maſter became now an inſupportable load. Dearly as he loved money, he could not look upon this price of blood, of the moſt precious blood, without horror—he could not keep it without torment. Every piece of ſilver was like a dart ſtriking thro' his liver, it was a ſting to his conſcience already tortured with a thouſand ſevere reflections. He was diſtreſſed till he had got rid of that ſordid gain, for which he had juſt now in a ſenſe bartered his immortal ſoul. He carried the thirty pieces of ſilver back to thoſe from whom he had received them, "ſaying, I have ſinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood." Thus did Providence order that our Lord ſhould have a teſtimony even from the man who had betrayed him. He made a confeſſion of his ſin, when it was not poſſible he ſhould have any temptation to prevaricate—a confeſſion, which nothing but a pungent ſenſe of guilt could have extorted from him.—He made it publicly, and in the preſence of thoſe who had been partners in his crime.—He made it before our Lord's crucifixion, that if poſſible he might prevent that awful tragedy.

It might reaſonably have been expected, that when the prieſts and elders heard the confeſſion, and ſaw the

diſtreſs of this unhappy man, they would be ſtruck with the deepeſt horror, and haſten to Pilate, in order to prevent the execution of the unjuſt ſentence they had compelled him to pronounce. But no diſpoſition of this kind appears. They expreſſed no remorſe for their own guilt—no concern for an innocent perſon juſt going to ſuffer a cruel death—nor the leaſt pity for a deſpairing wretch whom they had drawn into the crime which was the cauſe of his preſent diſtreſs. With a cool and determined countenance they anſwered him, "what is that to us? ſee thou to that."—"Is this," ſays one, "the language of rulers, yea, of prieſts? But they had caſt off the fear of that God, whoſe miniſters they were, and had devoted themſelves to gain and ambition. They therefore felt no remorſe, even when Judas trembled before them, and appeared almoſt diſtracted, under the ſenſe of a crime, in which they had been confederates with him. But their conſciences were ſeared as with a red hot iron, and all their familiar converſe with Divine things ſerved only, in ſuch a circumſtance, to harden their hearts, as tempered ſteel gathers ſtrength from the furnace, and the hammer." Judas could not thus quiet his conſcience. Their ſedateneſs in wickedneſs afforded no relief to him. It rather increaſed the agony of his mind to find them determined to proſecute their plan. He found there was no hope from them of ſaving that innocent, that illuſtrious perſon whom he had betrayed: and frantic with rage, "he caſt down the pieces of ſilver in the temple, and departed."—

ed."—Behold the deceitfulneſs of ſin !—Not many hours before, Judas received this money from them, and was gratifying himſelf with the thought of improving and enjoying what he had ſo wickedly procured. But now, he throws it back with deteſtation and contempt. It was of no value when his conſcience was awakened; it was nothing, leſs than nothing and vanity: Or rather, it was a burthen too heavy for him to bear.——So it is with ſin at all times and of all kinds, it is treacherous and deceitful. Men fondly imagine they ſhall enjoy great pleaſure in the gratification of their ſenſual or ambitious inclinations. They dream of continual delight and eaſe; but they find themſelves deceived and diſappointed. They miſs of the delight they expected—They meet with an adder in the path—— "In the midſt of laughter the heart is ſorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heavineſs." When conſcience is throughly alarmed, they would readily reſign all their honors, all their pleaſures, however dearly purchaſed, if that would give eaſe to their diſtreſſed minds. Conſcious of guilt, they wiſh they could recal the unhappy actions of their paſt lives; their hearts tremble for fear of God.—Happy for them, who mourn for ſin with that "godly ſorrow which worketh repentance unto life." This is not always the effect of convictions and awakenings. Some loſe all hope, their diſtreſs like that of Judas ends in black deſpair—Others drown ſorrow in their cups, or perhaps in the cares and amuſements of life—They have not grace to repent, even when they

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are ſenſible of their crimes. Too many return with "the dog to his vomit," and with the "ſow, that was waſhed, to her wallowing in the mire." It is impoſſible men ſhould act a more perverſe and unreaſonable part. If they were to live here always, or if death put an end to their exiſtence, their conduct would not be ſo criminal. But taking things as they are, it is ſtupidity, it is diſtraction. "Madneſs is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead." An awful ſound to the guilty ſinner!—They go to the dead—happy for them if this was all—Yes! Non-exiſtence, gloomy as the thought is, would be happineſs, when compared with that ſtate of miſery and ſorrow which awaits them. Oh! then, think of your ways before it be too late—repent while repentance may be of advantage to you—"Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

But to return to Judas—He departed from the prieſts and elders lightened of his money, but not at all quieted in his mind. And now—what courſe ſhould he have taken? What! but to have repaired to that Maſter he had betrayed—to have implored the mercy of that God he had ſo highly offended—and to have truſted to the merit of that blood he had been ſo impiouſly inſtrumental in ſhedding?—Who can ſay he might not have obtained mercy?—But inſtead of acting in this wiſe and rational manner, "he departed—and went and hanged himſelf."

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—Tremendous alternative!—To precipitate himſelf into that miſery which he dreaded!—and to hurry before the awful tribunal of a holy God, through fear of his vengeance!

Such a ſhocking inconſiſtency of conduct is every one guilty of who commits the horrid crime of ſuicide—a crime ſo contrary to all dictates of reaſon, and the very firſt principles of human nature, that ſome have ſuppoſed it impoſſible to be committed by any one, who is not deprived of the capacity of reaſoning and reflecting. I am willing to make every allowance for thoſe unhappy perſons who have been left of God to put an end to their own lives—It is not to be doubted, that a great part of them have loſt the poſſeſſion of themſelves, and therefore have not been moral agents, nor accountable for what they have done. But charity itſelf cannot conclude that this hath been the caſe with all who have laid violent hands on themſelves. It is not ſufficient to ſay this crime is to the higheſt degree irrational. May not this be ſaid of every wilful ſin? Men often break the laws of God, when they know and believe, that by their diſobedience they expoſe themſelves to the damnation of hell. They run with their eyes open into eternal perdition. They have reaſon, but they do not exerciſe it. They ſuffer themſelves to be governed by their appetites and paſſions, when they know the conſequence will be death; that their preſent conduct will accelerate the death of the body, and is likely

likely to terminate in the ſecond death. This may fitly be called madneſs and diſtraction, becauſe men under the government of reaſon would not act thus. But it is voluntary madneſs, and which they might prevent; and therefore they are juſtly chargeable with their irrational conduct.—And this I fear is too often the caſe with ſelf-murderers. They are themſelves the cauſes of that diſcontent, that ſhame, that horror, that deſpair, which have this fatal end—They act irrationally when they have power to act otherwiſe—They will not repent—They will not implore the mercy and grace of God—But give way to their gloomy paſſions, till they precipitate themſelves into an action, which is to the laſt degree criminal, and infinitely dangerous.—They riſe up againſt the government of God—take his work into their own hands—and, while they are guilty of a moſt daring act of rebellion againſt their ſovereign Lord, they put themſelves beyond the poſſibility of repentance.—To get rid of their preſent miſery, they plunge themſelves into that, which is not only greater, but abſolutely remedileſs—Let all, but eſpecially thoſe who are in great diſtreſs, whether of a temporal or ſpiritual nature, carefully arm themſelves with the ſtrongeſt reſolutions againſt every temptation to this dreadful ſin. Reject the firſt ſuggeſtion with deteſtation, it is both unnatural and diabolical, and doth not admit of the leaſt deliberation. As the moſt effectual preſervative, ſeek the Spirit and grace of God, to deliver you from ſuch thoughts, as, if indulged, are likely

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to end in perdition here and hereafter. It was deſpair of the mercy of the infinitely benevolent Jehovah that led Judas to deſtroy himſelf—a diſpoſition of mind, which, after all God hath done for man, is moſt inexcuſable and affrontive, and which we ought to reſiſt with the greateſt firmneſs and conſtancy—To think our caſe deſperate is the moſt likely way to make it ſo.

You doubtleſs obſerve ſome difference between the account given in our text, and that which we have in Acts 1. 18. There, the apoſtle Peter, ſpeaking of Judas, ſays, "and falling headlong he burſt aſunder in the midſt, and all his bowels guſhed out." Some, in order to reconcile theſe accounts, render the words in Matthew, that he was ſuffocated, namely, with grief, ſhame, and remorſe; or, which is the ſame thing, died of a ſquinancy occaſioned by it. And that he fell down on his face, and afterwards burſt aſunder, as is common to perſons in that diſtemper. ¶ But the more uſual conjecture, and which is not the leſs juſt for being common, is, that the rope or that to which it was faſtened gave way, ſo that he fell on his face, and, being at the top of ſome precipice, his bowels guſhed out by the violence of the fall. § Theſe circumſtances in the death of this wicked traitor more ſignally manifeſted the righteous judgment of God, to all who were witneſſes of them. "And it was known unto all the dwellers in Jeruſalem,"

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¶ Univ. Hiſt. vol. 10. p. 595. § Guyſe and Doddridge.

I ſhould gladly embrace the charitable ſentiment of thoſe, who think that the repentance of Judas was ſincere, and that he obtained mercy of God. But I cannot find any warrant for ſuch a concluſion. And we may not pervert the ſcriptures, even to magnify the grace of God.

How great the difference between Judas and Peter! and how different the diſpenſation of heaven towards them!—Judas betrayed his Maſter; Peter denied him—The crime of Judas was the effect of deliberate malice; Peter's of a ſudden ſurprize—Peter went out and wept bitterly; Judas departed and hanged himſelf—Peter was reſtored to his office; Judas was a ſon of perdition—Thus God "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." We are not indeed to ſuppoſe that God ever acts without reaſon: and though ſometimes the reaſon of his conduct is hid from us, yet in this caſe it was obvious. Peter had a good and honeſt heart, though he was guilty of a very great ſin; Judas had long been a baſe diſſembler, and had perfidiouſly embezzled the little ſtock with which our Lord had entruſted him.—Peter loved his Maſter, and followed him becauſe he believed him to be the Chriſt the Son of God; Judas had no regard to his Lord, and followed him only from baſe and ſordid motives.—Divine grace had made the difference, but the difference was made.—In all we ſee God's regard to holineſs,

and

and the perfect rectitude of his nature and of his conduct.

Behold alſo the ſovereign diſtinction made between Judas and the thief on the croſs.—Judas had long ſat under the inſtruction of him who ſpake as never man ſpake; he had been a profeſſor of religion, and was raiſed to the dignity of an apoſtle. The thief had lived in vice and wickedneſs, been an open enemy of God, and died a victim of juſtice.—He was taken and Judas left.—The thief heard from the mouth of the Saviour of the world, "this day thou ſhalt be with me in paradiſe;" Judas went to his own place.—No appearance of religion, nor ſacredneſs of character can avail us with a holy God, if we continue under the guilt of ſin, and are deceitful in our religious profeſſions. But on the other hand, repentance is never too late if it be ſincere; nor are any offenders excluded from a ſhare in the merits of Chriſt and the mercy of the goſpel, unleſs they exclude themſelves by unbelief and impenitence.

I have now gone through this affecting hiſtory, and have made ſo many practical reflections as I went along, that there ſeems but little occaſion for a particular application. There is one inference from the ſtory of Judas which I have already mentioned, but which is of ſo great importance that it deſerves a more particular conſideration.

It is this, That Jesus the great Founder of our religion was no impostor, but was in truth the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Our Lord came to introduce a new dispensation of religion; to accomplish the things "which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms," concerning an extraordinary person who was to come into the world to instruct and reform mankind. His religion was not, like that of Moses, to be confined to a particular nation; the kingdom of Christ was to be of large extent; according to the promise made to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."—Jesus himself was "not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" his personal ministry was confined to the land of Judea; and even there he was to be seen on the public stage only for a short time. In this time he was to lay the foundation of that kingdom which the God of heaven was to set up according to the ancient prophecies, a kingdom which was never to be destroyed.—He was to prove himself to be the Messiah promised to the fathers—and to give such evidences of his divine mission, as might be a sufficient ground of a rational faith, not only in his day, but in all ages of the world.——It was, therefore, not merely expedient, but necessary, that there should be a number to testify and bear witness of the great facts upon which the truth of christianity rests, and to publish them to the world. Accordingly, Jesus first "ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth

forth to preach, and to have power to heal ſicknesſes, and to caſt out devils." He afterwards ſent out ſeventy others on the ſame errand. But the firſt twelve were the perſons whom he admitted to the greateſt intimacy—they were with him in all his retirements—they followed him in all his journies—they received ſuch marks of favor, that, agreably to the carnal and ambitious notions of his kingdom which they at firſt entertained, they expected to be his miniſters of ſtate, and to ſuſtain the higheſt employments under him.——His view in calling them and keeping them near his perſon was indeed very different from their's : It was to prepare them for the glorious work of preaching the goſpel, and that they might be able to declare to the world the things that Jeſus had done and taught. Nothing could be more wiſely ordered, upon the ſuppoſition of the truth of chriſtianity, and the reality of our Saviour's divine miſſion. The apoſtles were authentic witneſſes of facts which they had "ſeen and heard," though they did not at firſt underſtand the great conſequence of thoſe facts, or of their teſtimony about them. By the marvellous deſcent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecoſt, the whole ſcheme of the chriſtian religion was committed to them, and they were endued with power from on high ; they then preached the goſpel with all boldneſs, and wonderful was the ſucceſs of their preaching. By the apoſtles, or by their means, and during their lives, chriſtianity had a ſwift and extenſive ſpread, not only thro'out

Judea,

Judea, but through a very great part of the world.

Let us now ſuppoſe, on the other hand, that Jeſus had ſome ſecret deſign different from that which he profeſſed, that he intended to propagate a falſhood, and upon this falſhood to erect his kingdom. His deſign muſt have been communicated to thoſe choſen followers who were to be employed in carrying it on: Or they muſt have diſcovered it themſelves. ——As they were with him at all times, and in all places, they muſt have had opportunity to obſerve his retired actions, and the moſt ſecret parts of his life: They muſt have known whether his private conduct was anſwerable to what he openly profeſſed. He called himſelf the Son of God, and publicly declared that he came to correct the falſe notions of religion and morality which had obtained, and to ſet an example of perfect virtue. There was reaſon to expect a perſon of ſuch an extraordinary character would be eminent for his devotion, his purity, his charity. They who were continually with him could not but ſee, whether there was any thing in his behavior, when retired from the view of men, inconſiſtent with theſe pretenſions, any thing that looked like art and colluſion, or like one who deſigned to deceive them, and to impoſe on the world. It was impoſſible that a perſon with whom they were converſant in all ſituations, and for a number of years, ſhould carry on ſuch a ſcheme, without giving them ſome ſuſpicion of his ſiniſter views; or that they ſhould be deceived in the miracles

racles which he pretended to work, and which were of ſuch a nature as not to admit of a deception, where thoſe who were witneſſes of them had only a common ſhare of underſtanding ; it follows therefore that if he was an impoſtor, his twelve diſciples at leaſt were confederate with him.

As Judas was one of our Lord's ſelect followers, one of the twelve who were his conſtant companions, if there had been any ſuch ſecret deſign as we have ſuppoſed, he muſt have been made acquainted with it ; if there had been any confederacy he would have been in it. There is no appearance of a diſtinction between him and the other apoſtles. In two or three inſtances, Jeſus took Peter, James, and John to be witneſſes of ſome tranſactions in which he choſe to be more private than common. But he did not raiſe theſe to any higher ſtation, nor allow them to aſſume a ſuperiority over their brethren. Nor did the notice he took of them give any offence to the other diſciples ; any more than the particular regard he ſhewed to John, who lay in his boſom, and was by way of eminence ſtiled the beloved diſciple, did to Peter and James. As to Judas, it is plain he was upon a par with his brethren. He was conſtituted an apoſtle at the ſame time ; he attended on our Lord as they did ; he was ſent forth as they were ; he was endowed with the ſame extraordinary gifts ; a particular truſt was committed to him ; he had the care of whatever ſum his Maſter was at any time owner of ; it was left to him to provide neceſſaries for the

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little company our Lord always had about him; and to distribute to the poor according to his Master's direction. Whatever obliquity there was in his heart, he appeared to the other disciples honest and faithful, they had no suspicion of his integrity, nor did his Master by any neglect or rebuke give him any occasion of disgust. If there had been any particular difference in the conduct of our Lord to Judas, or in that of Judas to his Master, any neglect, any coldness, or indifference, on the one side or the other, it would have raised suspicions in the minds of the eleven, and when Christ said "one of you shall betray me," they would have immediately fixed upon him as the person; whereas each one was more ready to mistrust himself, "and they began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?"

When Christ sent out his apostles to preach the gospel, and professed to give them a power of working miracles, Judas was sent forth with the others. The evangelist tells us, that Jesus gave his twelve disciples "power and authority over all devils and diseases." And we are told how fully they executed this commission; ‡ "And they went out and preached that men should repent; and they cast out many devils, and anointed with oyl many that were sick, and healed them," Now Judas could not but know, whether he had this power or not; whether he had in fact, by invoking the name of Jesus, healed diseases and cast out devils.

‡ Mark 6. 12, 13.

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Here was a fair trial of his Maſter's character and authority. If theſe miracles were wrought by power derived from him, and in confirmation of that religion he came to introduce, there was no room to diſpute his divine miſſion, or to doubt whether he was the Meſſiah. On the contrary, if Judas found that Jeſus profeſſed to give him a power, which he did not receive; and that he pretended to veſt him with authority over diſeaſes, of which notwithſtanding he did not find himſelf poſſeſſed, he muſt conclude Jeſus was not that extraordinary perſon he declared himſelf to be, but was a deceiver and impoſtor. If this was the caſe, Judas ought to have expoſed ſuch a mere pretender; he would have done right in diſcloſing any wicked ſecret which had been committed to him, in joining with the ſcribes and phariſees in undeceiving the people, and in uſing his utmoſt endeavors to bring ſuch an offender to condign puniſhment, and irritated as he was, no doubt he would have done it.

Did Judas make any ſuch diſcovery, even when he confederated with the prieſts and elders to betray his Maſter? Did he bring the leaſt charge againſt him of any ſecret wickedneſs? How eagerly would his enemies have catched at ſuch a confeſſion! How diligently would they have propagated ſuch a fact! What a triumph would it have afforded them over him who had ſet himſelf up as a Prophet, if one of his own diſciples had opened any private ſcheme, or had only ſuggeſted that he had

had pretended to more than he had been able to perform! How exactly would an insinuation of this sort have answered their views! and what use would they have made of it to undeceive the people who had conceived a high opinion of his person and character! What a principal evidence would he have been against Jesus on his trial before Pilate, when they were obliged to pick up every one who would alledge any thing that would serve the turn, whether true or false! But is there the least hint of any thing of this kind? No, they seemed willing to keep him out of sight during the trial, as one that would injure rather than help their cause. Judas, abandoned as he was, did not dare to prevaricate to such an awful degree, to assert any thing against his Master, or to charge him with the least crime. He was convinced of his perfect rectitude, and had been witness of the power which Jesus had exerted himself in innumerable instances, and which he had sometimes communicated to others, even to Judas himself; and this traitor most probably thought, that he who could "still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves," would quiet "the tumult of the people," and deliver himself out of their hands. This was no unreasonable conjecture after the much greater exertions of his divine power which Judas had been witness of.—When this miserable man found himself disappointed in this his expectation, he was seized with the greatest horror and distress from the thought

thought of what he had done; and, as the only expedient to obtain relief, he made a public declaration of his Maſter's innocence and his own perfidy and guilt to the Jewiſh rulers; that if poſſible, he might prevent the injuſtice and cruelty which were like to be the conſequence of his treachery. And when, to his utter confuſion, he found that he could make no impreſſion on their obdurate hearts, he put an end to his own life, as not able to bear the horrid tragedy which was going to be acted. Doth this look like a man who knew Jeſus to be a deceiver? Could there be a ſtronger evidence of his full conviction of his Maſter's integrity, and of the juſtice of his pretenſions? It ſeems impoſſible to account for the behavior of Judas in this laſt period of his life, upon any other ſuppoſition; and taking it in this view, it is a ſtrong confirmation of the truth of the chriſtian religion. And this ſerves to illuſtrate the wiſdom of God in appointing him one of the twelve.

God over-ruled this awful act of wickedneſs, as he more eminently did the death of that juſt one who was thus cruelly and ungratefully betrayed, to the purpoſes of his own glory; but this did not extenuate the crime, nor ſhould it leſſen our abhorrence of it. We ſee here a miſcreant, betraying his Lord and Maſter—a Maſter who had treated him with the greateſt affection, and had raiſed him to the higheſt honor—one, of whoſe divine miſſion he had the moſt convincing evidence, and whom he knew to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of men—one, whoſe preaching he had long ſat under, and whoſe holy life he had particular opportunity to

obſerve !—We ſee him deliberately contriving the ruin of this illuſtrious perſon ; pretending friendſhip while his heart was full of malice and deceit ! —What crime ſo black, that human nature is not capable of it !

Let us not wonder, if our friends forſake, betray, and abuſe us. Let us look for ſuch things in this deceitful wicked world. " The diſciple is not above his Maſter, nor the ſervant above his Lord."

While we tremble at the awful deſtruction of Judas, let us carefully avoid every approach to his ſin. Our Lord's perſon is indeed above any injurious attempt of our's, but men may have the ſame diſpoſition of mind that was ſo fatal to this ungrateful traitor, and may commit ſins that greatly reſemble his.——The day will come, when the ungodly ſinner, and the concealed hypocrite, muſt appear before his impartial tribunal. Then, all their diſſimulation, all their wickedneſs, will come to their remembrance, and fill them with remorſe and horror. How earneſtly doth Judas, that ſon of perdition, wiſh, that he had not been guilty of the impious deed which brought him to ſuch a dreadful end, or that he could recall his baſe and wicked treachery ! The beſt way to prevent ſuch fruitleſs wiſhes is to do nothing we ſhould deſire to recall. He who would not repent of betraying Chriſt, muſt take care not to betray him. Whatever preſent advantage any one may gain, by calling Chriſt Maſter and Lord, and at the ſame time betraying his cauſe and intereſt in the world, it will be as certainly true of him as it was of Judas, that " it had been good for him that he had never been born."

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

Man doomed to return to the duſt from whence he was taken.

GENESIS III. 19.

Duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return.

THERE is no ſubject which men are more loth to meditate upon than their own frailty and mortality. They ſhrink back at the thought of death, it ſpreads a melancholy gloom over their minds, and they wiſh to put far away the evil day. They live pleaſantly with their friends; they have many agreable enjoyments; and they cannot bear to think of leaving them. Eſpecially, they cannot think of entering into an eternity, which the moſt, it is to be feared, find themſelves unprepared for. They, therefore, avoid theſe gloomy reflections, and when they intrude, endeavor to diſſipate them

them amidſt the cares and pleaſures of life. This is too much the temper and conduct of mankind; and in nothing do they more evidently diſcover the folly which is bound up in their hearts. If, indeed, by forgetting death we could prevent it, if by inattention to this diſagreable ſubject, we could lengthen out our time on earth; or, if ſerious contemplations on mortality had a tendency to haſten a diſſolution, their conduct in ſuppreſſing theſe thoughts might admit of ſome excuſe. But is this the caſe? Can any one propoſe this advantage? or indeed, can he propoſe any advantage which ought to influence a reaſonable mind? It is a duty to think of death becauſe we muſt die; becauſe death concludes our time of probation; and fixes our ſtate forever. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Nothing can juſtify, nothing can excuſe our inattention to ſuch an intereſting, ſuch an important ſubject. If we do not often and ſeriouſly meditate on this great change, it is not likely we ſhall ever be prepared for it. But if we live under a conſtant apprehenſion of the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of life, we ſhall ſoon learn to apply our hearts unto wiſdom.—This would cure us of our fondneſs for worldly objects. We ſhould immediately perceive the vanity of all things here, if we duly conſidered that in a ſhort time we muſt leave them.——This would lead us to acquaint ourſelves more with the ſtate into which we are going

ing, and would make us ſollicitous to ſecure that eternity of happineſs which the goſpel reveals and offers. The chriſtian, who hath a lively faith in things future and inviſible, cannot feel a reluctance when called to leave the world; he will rather deſire earneſtly to be with Chriſt, which he muſt eſteem to be far better than the moſt comfortable ſituation in this life. The conſideration of our frailty and mortality would cauſe us to think ſoberly of ourſelves and as we ought to think: It would make us leſs ſollicitous about the body, and more careful about the ſoul which is incomparably the ſuperior part of man. Inſtead then of ſuppreſſing ſuch thoughts, we ſhould with the greateſt care cultivate and cheriſh them—we ſhould attend to the calls of God in his word and providence to get ready for our departure—we ſhould ſuffer nothing to divert us from that which is the great buſineſs of life—we ſhould not allow one day to to paſs without remembering the ſentence pronounced on the firſt Adam, and virtually on all his poſterity, "Duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return."

Theſe words teach us what was our original, and to what we ſhall be reduced. It will not be time ill-ſpent, if I lead you to ſome ſerious reflections on both.

In the firſt place, we are led up to our original, "Duſt thou art." In the account which Moſes gives

gives of the creation of man, we read, that "the Lord God formed man of the duſt of the ground." He put the particles together, and gave them that ſhape and form in which we now behold them. How much of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God is ſeen in this formation of our bodies!— How admirably is the whole frame contrived to anſwer the purpoſes for which it was deſigned; ſo that we cannot ſee how any part could be ſpared, or conſtituted better than it is; and are bound to ſay with the devout pſalmiſt, we are "fearfully and wonderfully made!" Every limb, every veſſel is placed ſo as to be moſt uſeful and convenient.— And how great is his power who could make theſe curious bodies out of the duſt of the earth, who could ſo exactly faſhion and modify that which is in itſelf quite vile and contemptible; and conſtitute a variety of uſeful organs from ſuch unpromiſing materials.

We are not to ſuppoſe man was wholly made up of duſt, "there is a ſpirit in man, and the inſpiration of the Almighty hath given him underſtanding." We read therefore, that when God had formed man of the duſt of the ground, "he breathed into his noſtrils the breath of life, and man became a living ſoul." 'Tis this ſoul which gives life and motion to the body, and which alone is ſenſible of pleaſure and of pain—'Tis this which thinks and reaſons, which chuſes and refuſes—This only is capable

pable of moral good and evil—It is a myſterious union which ſubſiſts between two ſuch different ſubſtances. It is wonderful, that matter and ſpirit ſhould be ſo cloſely connected as to make but one perſon, and yet each remain the ſame; that is, matter not become ſpirit, nor ſpirit become matter: That there ſhould be ſuch a near and intimate ſympathy between them, as that the ſtate of the one ſhould greatly affect the ſtate of the other. We are ſenſible of the fact, we feel the connection, but we know not how it is effected; we can form no idea of their mutual impreſſions or operations on each other,

'Tis obſervable, that our text ſpeaks in the preſent tenſe; not, duſt thou waſt, but "duſt thou art." This form of expreſſion intimates, that the body of man is eſſentially the ſame that it was at firſt. 'Tis the ſoul that diſtinguiſhes it from other matter; and renders it agreable, active, and uſeful. Let the ſpirit or ſoul withdraw, or be ſeparated from it, and the body will preſently fall into duſt, as mean and ſordid duſt as ever; which ſhews what it is in itſelf. It was duſt at firſt—it is now only a maſs of animated earth—and it will at length return to the duſt as it was.

But this leads us to conſider, Secondly, To what man will be reduced. "Duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return." We juſt obſerved, that the body of man was duſt originally; and if ſepa-

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rated from the ſoul it would fall into duſt again. But our bodies were nevertheleſs deſigned for immortality. If man had kept covenant with God, he would have been preſerved from death by the divine power. Had not man ſinned, there would have been no ſeparation between ſoul and body; and conſequently the body would have been always animated and capable of action. The threatning which God denounced as a ſanction of his law, and to deter man from the violation of it was, "In the day thou eateſt thereof thou ſhalt ſurely die." When he had ſinned, what was before only a threatning, was turned into a ſentence of condemnation; the ſentence was pronounced by God, his Sovereign—his almighty Judge. "Duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return." Nor was this deſigned to be the caſe with Adam only, to whom it was immediately ſpoken: He acted for his poſterity, ſo far at leaſt, as that they are by a righteous conſtitution of heaven, involved in the conſequences of his apoſtacy. This is the account the apoſtle gives us, "By one man ſin entered into the world and death by ſin, and ſo death paſſeth upon all men, for that," or, unto which, "all have ſinned," or are dealt with as ſinners. It may admit of diſpute, whether the ſin of Adam is imputed to his poſterity ſo as to transfer his guilt to them, but it is certain they all feel the effects of it—They are bro't by it into a ſinful imperfect ſtate—The mind is weakened and depraved, the paſſions and appetites have an undue influence, ſo that there

is none capable of moral action who doeth good and ſinneth not. Our bodies are mortal; we are haſtening to the grave, where the duſt will return to the duſt as it was. This is the unalterable decree of that God in whoſe hand our breath is; and in whoſe power it is to continue us in life, or to reduce us to our primitive nothing. "In Adam all die," the great and the rich, as well as the poor and the low: There is none can retain the ſpirit, or ſecure it from the ſtroke of death; "there is no diſcharge in that war." This is ſo plain a point, that you would all wonder if I ſhould labor to prove it, nor am I capable of bringing any more concluſive arguments, than offer themſelves to your thoughts without any help of mine.

When we look into our Bibles and read of the antediluvian patriarchs, that they lived eight and nine hundred years, yet the account of them is ſummed up with this at laſt, "and he died." After the flood the time of the life of man was gradually ſhortened, till it came to be limited to threeſcore years and ten, an age which few ſurvive.—One generation goeth and another cometh.—Our Fathers where are they?—They reſt from their toils and labors. If we look back to the firſt ſettlement of New-England, not one is to be found who was then alive. Of thoſe who laid the foundation of theſe riſing colonies it would be hard to find even the duſt. There are none now on the ſtage who have ſeen or known them. What was once viſible

of them is forgotten—The memory of theſe excellent men ſtill remains—Their names, their love to God, his truths and ways, will, we truſt, be had in everlaſting remembrance, and be an incitement to their poſterity to imitate their virtues.

But why do I ſpeak of the firſt ſettlers of New-England? If we have only retroſpect to our own time; how few are there that were on the ſtage of action within our remembrance! How many that a few years ago had parents to help, adviſe and protect them, are riſen up to be parents themſelves, and are called to do the ſame kind offices for their children.—Our progenitors are gone, and we are going after them.—How many of our friends, our relatives, our neighbours, have been laid in the ſilent grave, within the compaſs of a few years! If we have been on the public theatre only twenty or thirty years, or even leſs, and look back and think of thoſe with whom we firſt contracted an acquaintance, we find that there is but here and there one remaining—They are gone—the places that have known—the perſons that have ſeen them—we that have had agreable ſociety with them,—ſhall know—ſhall ſee—ſhall converſe with them no more.—And it will be ſaid of us in a ſhort time as it is of them—They are dead!—Some daily feel the decays of nature; they find their tabernacle of clay tottering and ready to fall. Such as theſe may well think of a diſſolution as not far off; they have the ſentence of death in themſelves. But

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whether we have ſuch premonitions or not, death may be nigh, even at the door. How many who could boaſt as firm a conſtitution as our's have been numbered with the dead! and that before they have been waſted with ſickneſs, or enfeebled by age! "One dieth in his full ſtrength, being wholly at eaſe and quiet: His breaſts are full of milk, and his bones are moiſtened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, and never eateth with pleaſure. They ſhall lie down alike in the duſt, and the worms ſhall cover them." "Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble."

We know that we muſt die, but we know neither when nor how. We may have years to live; or, God may ſay to us, "this night thy ſoul ſhall be required of thee." Thou doſt, perhaps, feel at preſent in perfect health; but, before the light of another day, thou may'ſt be ſeized with dying agonies—Thy body may be covered with a cold ſweat—Thy pulſe may tremble and intermit—Thy breath may grow ſhort—and every part of the vital frame may ceaſe to perform its proper function. That body which is now ſo hale and vigorous, may be a lifeleſs corpſe, and haſtening to the duſt from which it was taken. Theſe are things which do not admit of diſpute. They are truths which at once ſtrike the mind with conviction. None can deny them; and yet few attend to them as they

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ought. Were they mere ſpeculations, you might diſregard them without danger; it would be of no importance whether you attended to them or not. But ſince they are truths in which you are ſo nearly concerned; it becomes every friend of mankind —It becomes every chriſtian—It eſpecially becomes one who is appointed to watch for ſouls, to do what he can to rouſe you out of your criminal inſenſibility.

I muſt therefore obſerve, that nothing is to return to duſt, but that which was duſt before. The ſentence pronounced on man is, "Duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return." i. e. That part which is conſtituted of duſt muſt return to what it was at firſt. But the wiſe man aſſures us, that as "the duſt returns to the duſt," ſo "the ſpirit returns to God who gave it." The ſoul of man was not formed out of the earth as the body was, but was brought into exiſtence by the immediate act of the Deity, without the uſe of any materials already created. It is a ſpiritual ſubſtance. It hath no dependence on the body for life. It can exiſt and act without it; at leaſt no one can determine that it cannot. We may not with any certainty conclude, becauſe the body is without life and motion, that the ſoul ceaſes to exiſt, or to be active. He who formed the ſpirit of man within him can undoubtedly unmake it; and if there is any thing in that revelation with which he hath favored us, which makes it evident that this is his deſign, we ought to receive

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it as the truth, however contrary it is to our preconceived notions, to what we have expected or desired. But it is certain there is no declaration of this sort, nor the least intimation that the death of the body terminates the existence of the soul. So far from this, the whole current of scripture sets the other way. We have many intimations, that the spirits of men survive the body; that they not only exist, but are in an active state.—Why else did Paul "desire to depart to be with Christ;" when he could have greatly promoted the Redeemer's kingdom, and increased his own happiness, by remaining longer in the present world?—Why doth our Saviour say to the thief on the cross, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise?"—Why are we told in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, that when Lazarus died, he "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom," by which the Jews expressed the highest state of happiness in another world? But that the rich man, who is said to be buried, "lift up his eyes, being in torments?"—We read of the "spirits of just men made perfect."—And why should this thought of an intermediate state seem incredible, since the soul in the present state often acts, when we are not sensible that it makes any use of the body? Certainly this supposition implies no contradiction, nor doth it involve us in any absurdity. But I am not called to enlarge on this point, it was fit to mention it when I was speaking of our returning to dust. I proceed to the

IMPROVEMENT.

In the firſt place, Muſt theſe bodies return to duſt, this ſhould lead us to look upon them as they are, frail, fading, and periſhing. Nothing is more certain, than that our bodies will ſoon be food for worms, and reduced to the moſt ſordid duſt. This we have a moſt ſure and certain perſuaſion of; and yet how ſollicitous are we about them!—How curious in adorning them!—How elated with any little circumſtance in which they either do, or we imagine they do, excel others. Poor vain wretch! What is it you are ſo pleaſed with? What is it you value yourſelf upon? Upon a vile body—upon a body of humiliation—which ought, every time you think of it, to give you the moſt low and abaſing thoughts of yourſelf! That body is only duſt, kept together at preſent by the power of God; but it will ſoon be without life or motion—a mere lump of putrefaction—more ghaſtly and odious, than now it is beautiful and agreable. Your ſurviving friends will be as careful to cover it and bury it out of their ſight, as you are to diſplay the beauty of it. It might anſwer a valuable purpoſe, if our gay young people would now and then viſit the repoſitories of the dead, that they might ſee to what they ſhall ſoon be reduced, and might learn not to think more highly of themſelves than they ought to think. Where is that fine ſkin—thoſe beautiful features—that exact proportion—which vain minds meditate upon with ſo much pleaſure?—Canſt thou ſee any diſtincti-

on ?—do not all appear alike ſordid and frightful ?—You chuſe to retire from a ſight ſo diſagreable—an object ſo offenſive.—Juſt ſuch will you be after a few days and months are paſſed—Juſt ſo ſpectators will retreat from your ghaſtly viſage—or rather, from your polluted duſt, and naked bones !—'Tis a diſagreable picture I am obliged to draw—but it is a true likeneſs—it anſwers to the original.—Should I tell you that, after death, you would remain ſuch as you now are, you would not give credit to the report, you would know that it was only fooliſh flattery. And ſhould not ſuch vain creatures have a true mirror ſometimes ſet before them, that they may have a view of themſelves, and learn a leſſon of humility from the ſight ?

Secondly, How abſurd and irrational is it to ſpend all our time about our bodies, and to neglect our immortal ſpirits !—You ſee what your bodies are, how mean the materials of which they were compoſed at firſt, and how deſpicable their end is like to be.—Your ſouls have a more noble original. They are produced by the inſpiration of the Almighty ; and they have ſome reſemblance of their Creator. They are not to die with the body ; but are, in a ſeparate ſtate, to enjoy compleat happineſs, or ſink into inexpreſſible miſery, according to the things done in the body. And, upon this view of things, I am willing any man ſhould be judge in his own cauſe. Who can pretend to juſ-

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tify, or even excuſe his own conduct, in purſuing after wealth, honor, ſenſual pleaſure, or any kind of happineſs, which terminates in the body, and muſt ceaſe with it ; while he neglects his ſoul, which is deſigned for immortality ?——We blame not your care about the world, and to ſecure things that are convenient for the body, provided it do not degenerate into anxiety ; if your love of the world is not inordinate, and you are not immoderate in your purſuit of earthly things. We only urge you to place your affections on things according to their true worth and importance. Earthly things are good, ſo far as they anſwer the end for which they were deſigned ; this end is to ſupport life, and to make your ſituation here agreable. But they were never deſigned to be your portion ; they ought not to engroſs your attention ; they cannot make you happy in this world, and they will not follow you into another. " Naked," ſays Job, " came I out of my mother's womb, and naked ſhall I return thither."——We blame you then, if you ſet a higher value on the things of this world than they deſerve ; if you look for more good from them than they are capable of yielding you.—We condemn you, as acting a moſt weak and unreaſonable part, if you take greater care of your bodies, than of your ſouls, which are ſo much ſuperior, and upon the care of which your eternal ſtate depends —if you labor for the meat which periſheth, and not for that which endures to everlaſting life— if you ſeek to be rich and great here, and are not

ſollicitous to be rich towards God, and to ſecure eternal glory. "What will it profit," my brethren, "if you gain the whole world, and loſe your own ſoul."? All the happineſs which you can enjoy in this world is unſatisfying in it's nature, and momentany in it's duration: But the miſery of the future world is awful, is dreadful, is permanent.

Permit me to put a caſe to thoſe who are ſeeking a portion in this life and forget another; let conſcience give the anſwer and make the application. There have been, it is to be feared, many great and rich men, who have been able to command every earthly enjoyment that their hearts could wiſh for; but they have been ſtrangers to religion, have indulged to luxury and vice, and are now in a ſtate of puniſhment.—There have been others, low in their worldly circumſtances, deſtitute of the comforts and even the neceſſaries of life; but they have been rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom, and are now entered on their reward.—Is there a wretch, think you, in the place of torment, let his ſituation on earth have been ever ſo exalted, who would not be willing, taking both worlds into conſideration, to change ſtates with any one in the kingdom of heaven, even with one who had gone through the moſt afflicted and trying ſcenes here, and who had the loweſt place there?—But on the other hand, do you think the leaſt ſaint in the kingdom of glory would conſent to take the place of any

one in the regions of the damned, though, previous to ſuch an exchange, he might enjoy the higheſt degree of proſperity that any one ever arrived at in this world.—What glorified ſaint would not prefer a life of poverty and diſtreſs, conſidered in connection with the happineſs that hath followed, to a life of the greateſt affluence and glory which muſt terminate in extreme miſery?—What damned ſpirit would not chearfully endure all temporal ſorrow, if he might eſcape everlaſting deſtruction?—Oh! how would a condemned ſinner leap with joy, to hear that he was again to be put on his probation; or to have the leaſt glimmering of hope, that God would entertain thoughts of mercy! You, who are yet on this ſide the eternal world, have not merely a glimmering of hope, you are favored with the invitations of the goſpel; it is an accepted time, it is a day of ſalvation. But after this life, you will have no more calls, no more invitations; as the tree falls ſo it will lie; as your moral ſtate is when you die, ſo will your eternal ſtate be fixed.—— What we urge you to is, to live and act now, as you yourſelves are convinced, you ſhall wiſh you had acted, if you leave the world in a ſtate of impenitence and unbelief.

Thirdly, When we ſee others expiring and returning to their duſt, it ſhould put us in mind of our diſſolution. Such ſights we often ſee in this dying world. Our relatives and friends are continually leaving us. We have frequent occaſion to

ſigh

ſigh out that mournful complaint, " Lover and friend haſt thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkneſs." They are laid in the grave; death feedeth upon them, and their beauty is conſumed. As they are, thou wilt ſoon be; thy body like their's will moulder in the grave. But—where will thy ſoul then be? This is an enquiry you ought often to make. If God ſhould ſee fit to looſe the vital band, in what ſtate would my ſoul be? I am aſſured this will not return to duſt, becauſe it hath not, it never had any thing earthly in it's conſtitution, unleſs earthly deſires and inclinations are a part of it. I am taught in the ſcriptures, that my " ſpirit will return to God," will return—not to be annihilated; but to receive a ſentence of abſolution or condemnation, according to the things done in the body. Which of theſe ſentences ſhould I receive, if God ſhould this night require my ſoul of me?—And who knows but he may?—Have I ſubmitted to Chriſt?—Am I a new creature?—Do I poſſeſs a chriſtian, a heavenly temper?—Have I led a holy life?—Am I not rather a ſtranger to religion?—under the dominion of my luſts?—Do not my works prove, that if I ſhould leave the world as I am at preſent, I ſhould ſink into everlaſting perdition?—Shall I continue in ſuch a ſtate of awful danger?—Shall I not immediately repair to that Saviour who is the only hope ſet before me?—Shall I not without delay accept the gracious invitations of the goſpel?—Lord, aſſiſt me by thy grace, and work in me both to will and to do of

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thy good pleaſure.——Some ſuch thoughts as theſe we ought always to have when we ſee others dying or dead: Eſpecially when they are thoſe who were near to us in one way or another. Such providences ought to lead us to ſerious reflections on our own mortality; if they do not, it looks as if nothing would.

Fourthly, From what hath been ſaid, we learn the evil of ſin. Tho' our bodies were but duſt, and therefore not immortal in their own nature, yet they might have been preſerved in life by the power of God. If man had not ſinned, he would not have died; the union between ſoul and body would never have been diſſolved. But no ſooner had Adam eaten the forbidden fruit, than he became a frail dying creature. Thus did God teſtify againſt the ſin of man. Every time, therefore, we ſee any cut off by the king of terrors, we have a clear proof of the malignant nature of moral evil, which introduced ſorrow, frailty, and mortality into the world.—Nor is the death of the body the only bad effect of the diſobedience of the firſt parent of the human race. Man is, by means of the firſt ſin of Adam, brought into ſuch a ſtate, that all who are capable of moral action do actually ſin againſt God their Maker and Lord. The appetites and paſſions gain the aſcendant, and prevail againſt all remonſtrances of reaſon and conſcience. How ſuch a depraved nature is conveyed from Adam to his poſterity, it is difficult for us to ſay; as it is to reconcile it to

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the perfections of God, that there ſhould be ſuch a connection between the firſt man and his deſcendants, or indeed to permit the introduction of moral evil at all. The latter none will deny, and that this unhappy event is the conſequence of Adam's apoſtacy from God ſeems plain from the ſacred oracles of truth, "By one man ſin entered into the world." Every deviation from the law of God defiles us more and more; it incurs the diſpleaſure of a holy God; and expoſes to that puniſhment which is denounced againſt the ſinner in his word. —How clearly doth all this evidence ſin to be the worſt of evils! 'Tis evil in the ſight of God, or he would not puniſh it with ſuch ſeverity. And it is the greateſt evil to man ſince it hath brought upon him death in this world, and expoſes him to perdition in another. Is ſin ſo great an evil? how carefully ſhould you watch againſt every tendency, and avoid every temptation to it!—What folly! what madneſs! to cheriſh a ſerpent that carries ſuch a ſting; and whoſe fatal venom you have ſo ſadly felt! Let no enticement prevail with you to act contrary to the rules of reaſon and religion; and devoutly implore his aid and aſſiſtance whoſe grace alone can keep you from falling.

Fifthly, What hath been ſaid may ſerve to vindicate God from injuſtice, or even from hardſhip, in ſentencing man to death. By this he put man into no worſe ſtate than he was originally in. He was duſt, and God determined that he ſhould

return

return to duſt again. Had the Creator given him life and then taken it from him, without default of his, I know not that it would have been contrary to any rule of juſtice or equity. He hath a right to take what he gave. But how perfectly juſt and equitable is his proceeding, when we conſider him as acting in quality of a judge! Death was the threatning denounced; it was the ſanction with which God had guarded his law; it was a puniſhment no way diſproportioned to the demerit of the crime; and therefore the inflicting it when man had ſinned, ſeemed to be not merely an act of juſtice, but of wiſdom, that the creatures of God might have a teſtimony of his averſion to ſin, and a diſcovery of his rectoral holineſs. As to the other conſequences of the apoſtacy, the entail of ſo many evils and diſtreſſes on the poſterity of the firſt man, the ſtate of depravity and ſin into which mankind are bro't, and that future miſery which will be the portion of a great part of the human race; without pretending to remove all the difficulties in which this ſubject is involved, it may be ſufficient to ſay, that however mankind have reaſon to regret and mourn the original apoſtacy, as it is the cauſe of ſo much ſin and diſtreſs; yet every hard thought of God muſt vaniſh, when we conſider the proviſion which a wiſe and good God hath made for our relief and deliverance. Thro' the mediation of Chriſt man may not only eſcape the miſery of which he ſeems in danger; but may attain the perfection of his nature in holineſs and happineſs. And to this end the

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evils of life are made ſubſervient. So that God hath over-ruled even the apoſtacy of man, as to his own greater glory, ſo to our advantage. Our bodies turn to duſt, but they will be raiſed; our ſouls are defiled, but they may be renewed by the Spirit of God; we are brought into danger of everlaſting ruin, but we are by Chriſt raiſed to the hope of a bleſſed immortality. All this bleſſedneſs is ſet before us in the goſpel, if we do not obtain it the fault will be our own. Inſtead then of complaining of hardſhip, we have reaſon to admire the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, who hath by Chriſt brought man into better circumſtances than he could have been in merely by the law of his nature. This leads to another reflection,

Sixthly, How thankful ſhould we be that life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel! It is an unhappy ſituation to which the apoſtacy of man hath reduced the whole human race. But what a different ſcene doth the goſpel open to view! Here we behold an offended God ſeated on a throne of grace; reconcilable to his fallen creature; kindly ready to deliver him from the ſorrowful effects of his apoſtacy; willing again to ſtamp his image on the ſoul; and to admit him to glory and happineſs. Nor are our bodies beneath his notice. The goſpel doth not, indeed, promiſe deliverance from death; but it promiſes a reſtoration to life; that this corruptible ſhall put on incorruption, and this mortal ſhall put on immortality. Thus

Thus hath the ſecond Adam retrieved what we loſt in the firſt, "As in Adam all die, ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive." How much reaſon is there for gratitude to him who hath pitied us in our low eſtate, and ſent his Son to redeem and ſave us! What condeſcending goodneſs doth it diſcover that he ſhould take ſo much care of theſe tabernacles of clay, which were made of duſt, and which ſin hath rendered ſo ſordid and frail!—We are often called to attend the burial of our friends, we ſee the triumphs of the king of terrors; at ſuch times, let us turn our thoughts to that glorious day, when "the Lord himſelf will deſcend from heaven with a ſhout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Chriſt ſhall riſe."—How doth this glorious proſpect ſcatter the horrors of the grave!—How reaſonably may we comfort ourſelves and one another with theſe words, when we are called to part with friends who died in hope! Their ſouls are now happy with the Lord; and thoſe bodies which are returning to the duſt, will be awakened out of their graves, and ſhall be faſhioned like to Chriſt's glorious body.—How may this conſideration give us courage in an hour of death! Of what conſequence is it what becomes of our bodies when we die, if our ſouls are ſafe. That ſordid duſt to which we muſt return will be preſerved by God for the moſt happy purpoſes, it will change its humiliating appearance, and will be as ſhining and glorious as now it is mean and vile.—This will be the happy

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portion only of thoſe that have an intereſt in Chriſt, who is the reſurrection and the life.—Although a ſtate of bleſſed immortality is revealed to man; yet we may not from thence think, that all the children of Adam will certainly be admitted to happineſs. No, the goſpel hath its terms and conditions as well as the law; and unleſs we comply with them, we ſhall be more miſerable, than if Chriſt had not come to redeem and ſave men. The grace of the goſpel will increaſe our condemnation. Let us therefore embrace that Saviour whom God hath provided, and ſubmit to him in his whole character. Let us make a buſineſs of religion, and ſuffer nothing to take us off from the care of our ſouls. It ought to be a mighty incentive to us to be diligent in this great work, that this is our only working time; as death leaves us, ſo judgment will find us, and ſo our future ſtate will be determined. None can tell how ſhort this time may be. We have conſtant admonitions of our frailty in the deaths of others, and in our own weakneſſes and infirmities; let us therefore work while the day laſts, the night of death cometh wherein no man can work.

Well may the guilty determined ſinner tremble at the thought of appearing before the tribunal of Jeſus Chriſt. There is ſomething awful in the thought of eternity. The righteous man ſhudders when he thinks of going into a ſeparate unknown

ſtate. Hath not he reaſon to fear who hath no proſpect but of a miſerable futurity? Attend then to the voice of reaſon and of conſcience which is the voice of God. If any thing deſerves attention, this doth. "Endeavor," as one ſpeaks, "to make ſure work for dying and for eternity, that you may die well, and not miſcarry in that great and laſt change. An error here is fatal and cannot be corrected, conſequently the utmoſt caution is due in order to avoid it. It was a good anſwer to one who aſked why the Lacedemonians were ſo ſlow in paſſing capital judgments, why ſo many examinations taken; ſo many defences permitted to the accuſed; and after conviction and ſentence ſuch a ſpace of time before execution; becauſe, ſaith he, a miſtake in this caſe is incorrigible, they may deſtroy the living, but cannot revive the dead. And thus it is in the affair before me; when the ſentence of death is paſſed and executed, it cannot be reverſed: my ſtate is determined for ever. 'Tis appointed for all men once to die, once and but once, they do not live again, have no further opportunity to repent of what was ill done, of what was undone. Help me, therefore, Oh my God, to ſecure this main point, this greateſt point, to get ready for dying, dying with ſafety and comfort!" ¶

¶ Mr. Grove.

SERMON

SERMON XX.

The Bleſſedneſs of thoſe who have not ſeen and yet have believed.

JOHN XX. 29.

Jeſus ſaith unto him, Thomas, becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed. Bleſſed are they, that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.

OUR Lord had often, during the courſe of his miniſtry, predicted his death and reſurrection in ſuch plain terms, that we, in theſe days, have no difficulty in underſtanding him; and yet, it is evident, the apoſtles did not expect his death, and were greatly ſhocked when that event took place. They had no notion of his riſing again, and were very ſlow in believing it, when it was affirmed by thoſe who had ſeen him.

Theſe good men had very dark and contracted notions of the Meſſiah's kingdom, till the Holy Ghoſt

Ghoſt was poured out.—Then they underſtood, that the Meſſiah was not to be a temporal Prince, as they before expected; but was to reign in the hearts of men.—Then, they found they were not to be raiſed to earthly grandeur, to live a life of eaſe and ſplendor; but were to encounter the moſt fierce oppoſition, to ſuffer the moſt cruel perſecution, and to be, were it not for the hopes of immortality, of all men the moſt miſerable.——And their diſpoſition was ſo entirely changed, that they had no deſires after that magnificence, the idea of which had before taken full poſſeſſion of them. They were willing to ſuffer, and even to die for the name of the Lord Jeſus. They went about —not to enliſt men under his banner, and to ſubdue the Romans and other nations to the Jews—not to make themſelves rich and great in this world.—But to turn men from theſe vanities; to ſet up a ſpiritual kingdom; to make known the doctrine of forgiveneſs through a Mediator, and to teach the certainty of an immortal ſtate of happineſs in another world.—To this benevolent employment they devoted themſelves; in this they chearfully ſpent their lives: And, through their indefatigable labors, the word of God grew mightily, and prevailed againſt all oppoſition. By means of their preaching, and the precious remains they have left in the ſacred records, the weakeſt chriſtians have now more juſt notions of the Meſſiah's kingdom, and comprehend more fully our Lord's meaning, when he ſpake of his dying and riſing again; than did even theſe choſen veſſels, while their Maſter was with them. We

We are ready to wonder that the apoſtles did not remember, as well as the Jewiſh rulers, that Jeſus had ſaid, "while he was yet alive, after three days I will riſe again." But they were ſo affected with his unexpected death, that it is plain they did not remember this prediction, ſo as to receive any conſolation from it. His crucifixion put an end to their hopes, and left them in a ſtate of dejection and diſtreſs. They did not know what to make of the firſt reports of our Saviour's reſurrection; and it was not till they had ſenſible demonſtration of the certainty of this event, that they diſmiſſed their doubts, and gave full credit to this great and fundamental article of our holy religion.

Jeſus firſt appeared to Mary Magdalene—Then to the other women who were going from the ſepulchre: But the diſciples to whom they related what they had ſeen did not believe them. "Their words ſeemed to them as idle tales."—Afterwards, he appeared to Simon—Then to two diſciples as they went to Emmaus. When they told this to the reſidue, they believed them not, at leaſt they had their doubts and ſuſpicions. They would not admit the truth of this important fact, till they had the teſtimony of their ſenſes.—Our Lord therefore condeſcended to give them this evidence. "The ſame day at evening, when the doors were ſhut, where the diſciples were aſſembled for fear of the Jews, came Jeſus and ſtood in the midſt of them."

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Even then, it is ſaid, " they believed not for joy." They were ſo criminally incredulous, that their Lord " upbraided them for their unbelief and hardneſs of heart," after he had given them ſuch manifeſt proof of his being riſen.

Now, it ſeems, they were in general ſatisfied. " But Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jeſus came. The other diſciples therefore ſaid unto him, we have ſeen the Lord. But he ſaid unto them, except I ſhall ſee in his hands the print of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, and thruſt my hand into his ſide, I will not believe." After the evidence Thomas had of the reſurrection of Jeſus, there ſeems to have been an unreaſonable obſtinacy in this determination. He knew his brethren to be honeſt men; and after the united teſtimony of ſo many to a fact in which they could not eaſily be deceived, his incredulity could not be juſtified. If men were to inſiſt on ſenſible demonſtration in all caſes, there would be an end of teſtimony, and endleſs confuſion would be introduced.

However, our Lord condeſcended to the weakneſs, or if you will, the perverſeneſs of Thomas, though he left him a conſiderable time in a ſtate of anxious uncertainty. He knew the honeſty of his heart, and therefore would not leave him in unbelief. He overlooked what was amiſs, and kindly gave him the evidence he deſired. " And after

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eight days, again his diſciples were within, and Thomas with them: Then came Jeſus, the doors being ſhut, and ſtood in the midſt, and ſaid, peace be unto you. Then ſaith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thruſt it into my ſide, and be not faithleſs but believing." This is a tender but very plain rebuke of Thomas's incredulity. He lets him know, that he was well acquainted with his unbelief, and the manner in which he had expreſſed it. But without upbraiding or reproaching him with his obſtinacy, (in which perhaps there was a mixture of reſentment, becauſe Chriſt had not given him the ſame evidence he had given his fellow-diſciples) inſtead of upbraiding him with this faulty diſpoſition, our Lord invites him to receive the very proof he had inſiſted upon. Thomas, ſtruck with the condeſcenſion of his Maſter, and aſhamed of his backwardneſs to believe, proceeded no further, ſought no other means of conviction, but cried out with ſurprize and joy, My Lord! and my God! —He not only received him as riſen, but in the ſtrongeſt terms acknowleged the dignity of his perſon and character.—I ſay Thomas proceeded no further;—for, as it is not ſaid that he attempted to ſearch for the wounds, according to his former declaration, we ought to ſuppoſe that, convinced by what he had ſeen and heard, he immediately owned the truth of our Lord's reſurrection, without a particular examination of his body. This is eſpecially probable, as in our text it is implicitly aſſerted, that

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his faith was founded in ſight. "Jeſus ſaith unto him, Thomas, becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed. Bleſſed are they, that have not ſeen, and yet have believed." Theſe words are not to be taken in ſo ſtrict a ſenſe, as if every one who believed without the evidence of ſight, would be more bleſſed than they who ſaw Jeſus after his reſurrection; in which caſe, every one who believed after our Lord was taken up into heaven, would have a ſuperior degree of happineſs to the apoſtles themſelves. The words can only imply, that the bleſſedneſs of thoſe who have not ſeen is ſuperior, where all other circumſtances agree or are equal. Or that where a man yields to rational evidence without ſeeing, he is in a more happy ſtate of mind, than another, whoſe aſſent riſes only to the ſame degree, and is founded on the evidence of ſenſe. "It was in effect, telling Thomas, it would have been much more acceptable, if he had not ſtood out ſo long; and it was doing it in ſuch a manner, as would be moſt calculated for the comfort and encouragement of believers in future ages, to whom, in many of his ſpeeches to the apoſtles themſelves, our Lord expreſſed a moſt obliging and affectionate regard."

Poſſibly Jeſus might intend, in theſe words, to expreſs his particular approbation of John, the writer of this goſpel, who ſeems to have been the firſt that believed the truth of his Lord's reſurrection. We are told in the beginning of this chapter,

ter, that when Mary Magdalene had informed Peter and John that they had "taken away the Lord out of the ſepulchre; they ran both together, and the other diſciple did out run Peter, and came firſt to the ſepulchre." Being naturally timid and cautious, he did not enter in: "But ſtooping down, ſaw the linen cloaths lying; yet went he not in." "Then cometh Simon Peter," and being of a more bold and forward diſpoſition, he "went into the ſepulchre, and ſeeth the linen cloaths lie; and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen cloaths, but wrapped together in a place by itſelf." The other diſciple, encouraged by Peter's example, ventured to go in after him, "and he ſaw and believed"—Saw what?—He ſaw what Peter had ſeen—"The napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen cloaths, but wrapped together in a place by itſelf." He ſaw all things diſpoſed in ſuch regular order, as ſhewed that the body of Jeſus was not haſtily hurried away, as if it had been ſtolen, but that there was rather the appearance of calmneſs and leiſure.

"He ſaw and he believed," that is, ſay moſt commentators, he believed what Mary Magdalene had reported, that they had taken away the body of Jeſus. How jejune a ſenſe! and what reaſon is there for departing from the common ſenſe of the word *believed* in the new-teſtament? which is an aſſent to the truth concerning Jeſus Chriſt; or a belief of his general character as Meſſiah. It had

hardly been worth mentioning, that John believed the body was not in the ſepulchre, when he ſaw it was not there. It is much more probable, that this is, as Dr. Doddridge underſtands it, "a modeſt intimation, that John firſt indeed of all others believed the truth of Chriſt's reſurrection; inferring it, as he reaſonably might, from the order in which he found the ſepulchre. Theſe words" ſays he, "have a force, and a grace, on this interpretation, which no other can give them." ¶—Nor do the words immediately following at all militate with this ſenſe, "For as yet they knew not the ſcriptures, that he muſt riſe again from the dead."—Theſe words may be conſidered as an excuſe for their not believing that Chriſt was riſen, till this time: Or, they may intend, that none of the diſciples (not even John, though he believed that Chriſt was riſen) fully underſtood the ſcriptures which referred to this great event, and how great good was connected with it; which was undoubtedly true. If this ſenſe of John's believing is juſt, we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, his Lord deſigned, in our text, to expreſs his approbation of his faith, who believed that Chriſt was riſen, before he ſaw his Perſon; which was what no other had done.

But, upon the ſuppoſition, that our Lord had this in view, when he ſaid, "Bleſſed are they who have not ſeen, and yet have believed;" the words

¶ See alſo Mr. Weſt's admirable obſervations on the reſurrection of CHRIST.

words are by no means to be confined to this inſtance, but are to be extended to all who believe in all ages, through the word of thoſe who had ſeen Chriſt riſen. Bleſſed are they in time! and bleſſed throughout eternity !

From the words of our text we obſerve,

Firſt, That though we have not ſenſible demonſtration of the reſurrection of Chriſt, yet there is ſufficient evidence to produce a rational belief of this great and important fact. There can be no doubt that Chriſt aroſe from the dead, if the account given by the evangeliſts is true. It is aſſerted in the moſt expreſs terms. And how ſuch an hiſtory could be obtruded on the world, if it was not true, cannot eaſily be conceived. There is not only the teſtimony of a number of honeſt ſenſible men, that they ſaw Chriſt after he was riſen, converſed with him, ſaw him eat, felt his body, or might have handled it, were invited to ſatisfy themſelves as much as they pleaſed. There is not only this direct teſtimony, but the reſurrection of Chriſt was followed with a remarkable effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt, whereby the diſciples were enabled to ſpeak with tongues, and to perform the moſt extraordinary miracles. Theſe powers, they expreſly declared, were in conſequence of the reſurrection and aſcenſion of Jeſus. The miracles they performed were of ſuch a nature, that it was ſcarce poſſible they who were preſent ſhould be deceived. Eſpecially they who were continually watching to

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enſnare them, and who conſtantly oppoſed and reviled them.—If they were wrought, they were an indubitable evidence that Chriſt was riſen, and conſequently was the promiſed Meſſiah.—If they were not wrought, no man could have had the inſolence to ſay they were. Inſtead of being attended to, and of converting any to the faith of Chriſt, all would have rejected them as baſe impoſtors; it had been right to treat them as ſuch; and they themſelves muſt have had the conſcious horror of ſuffering the juſt demerit of their crimes. Whereas the goſpel preached by them had free courſe, ran, and was glorified. Multitudes believed. Some of ſuperior character, with reſpect both to their ſtation and abilities; and even ſome who had with cruel zeal oppoſed their Maſter, and with wicked hands had crucified and ſlain him.

The apoſtles could have no worldly inducement to aſſert or propagate a falſhood; they amaſſed no riches; they were advanced to no places of dignity; they endured hardneſs; they were abuſed, ſcourged, and treated with all kinds of ignominy and cruelty. They could expect nothing but perſecution, ſufferings and death, if they profeſſed to own Chriſt as their Maſter and Lord.

The backwardneſs of the diſciples to believe the reſurrection of Chriſt, however faulty, is an argument of the reality of the fact. It was a demonſtration that they were not willing to be deceiv-

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ed; that they were cautious in yielding their aſſent; and conſequently that they had the fulleſt evidence that Jeſus was riſen, before they believed it. They would not believe the teſtimony of their companions, whom they knew, and of whom they could have no reaſonable ſuſpicion. They had repeated atteſtations, and yet inſiſted on the evidence of their own ſenſes. Then, and not till then, they ſubmitted. They did not believe till the evidence was irreſiſtible. Which circumſtance, though it leſſened the virtue of their aſſent, yet renders it more convincing to thoſe who come after. Their unbelief for ſo long a time, joined with the effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt, and the power with which they were endued from on high, renders the truth of our Saviour's reſurrection indubitable.

In this reſpect, we have the advantage of his immediate followers. They had not thoſe proofs of his divine miſſion which we have, in his reſurrection, and the great events conſequent upon it and connected with it. Theſe are the greateſt and the higheſt evidence of the truth of chriſtianity. And therefore many are of opinion, that our Saviour refers to them, when he ſays, "All manner of blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men; and whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the

the world to come." † Even thoſe, who rejected Chriſt when on earth, might be brought to conviction and repentance, and ſo obtain forgiveneſs of their ſins, when they ſaw the power of the Holy Ghoſt accompanying his apoſtles and followers. But our Lord warns his hearers, that if they ſhould blaſpheme the Holy Ghoſt in his moſt ſignal gifts and operations, by which he would bear witneſs to the truth of chriſtianity, and ſhould reſiſt this higheſt evidence, which God would ever vouchſafe to give; they muſt be left in impenitence and unbelief, and be excluded forgiveneſs. A conſideration which may well alarm the infidels of the preſent day; and ſhould make us all careful, not to contract their guilt, nor expoſe ourſelves to their puniſhment!

Secondly, There may be doubts about the truths of religion, where there is real ſincerity of heart. What more important truth than the reſurrection of Chriſt? and yet the diſciples, who had followed our Lord with ſuch affection and diligence, were hardly perſuaded to believe it. Thomas's doubts might proceed from the great deſire he had that the reſurrection of Chriſt might prove true, and his fear of being diſappointed. This was a right diſpoſition in itſelf, though it degenerated into unreaſonable diffidence, and even a perverſe obſtinacy. Should not this teach us charity towards thoſe, who may not immediately embrace truths which we apprehend

† Matt. 12. 31, 32.

prehend of great importance? Things may not appear to them in the ſame ſtrong light they do to us. They may have difficulties which we have not. —It ſeems ſtrange to us, that the apoſtles did not ſooner believe that Chriſt was riſen; but we have not their prejudices, their diſappointment, and wrong notions to combat with; we cannot realize them. We believe they were honeſt good men long before. And may not others be under miſtakes when they err from the truth, as we think? Every error doth not proceed from a wicked mind, and it is not for us to ſay, how far a good man may fall into wrong ſentiments in religion. God may have wiſe ends in permitting ſuch miſtakes; as he had in permitting the diſciples to be ſo unreaſonably backward in believing Chriſt was riſen, viz. to give others ſtronger reaſon to believe this important fact. This we may be ſure of, that God will not ſuffer a ſincerely good man to continue in an error which would prove fatal. "If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." It becomes us to be very cautious, how we determine any point to be fundamental, which God hath not determined to be ſo.

I may properly add here, That a truth may be fundamental under ſome circumſtances, which is not under others. The reſurrection of Chriſt, tho' plainly taught by him, was not a fundamental doctrine before his death: The belief of it was not neceſſa-

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ry to denominate the apoſtles good men, when they denied it. And yet the apoſtle Paul tells us it was afterwards. "If Chriſt be not raiſed, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your ſins."‖ The reaſon is plain. Their circumſtances and our's are very different. We have not their pre-conceived notions to oppoſe; and we have means of conviction which they had not.—A further argument this to mutual candor and forbearance. As we cannot exactly tell the circumſtances and prejudices which other men are under, it is beſt not to judge or cenſure our brethren; but to leave them to Him, who "is a God of knowlege, and by whom actions are weighed."

Thirdly, We obſerve, that to yield our aſſent, when we have proper moral evidence, is more commendable, than to inſiſt on the evidence of ſenſe. We all think Thomas, and indeed all the diſciples faulty, in being ſo backward to believe, when they had ſuch evidence of our Saviour's reſurrection. Our Lord ſeverely rebuked the two diſciples, with whom he walked in the way to Emmaus, "O fools, and ſlow of heart to believe all that the prophets have ſpoken! ought not Chriſt to have ſuffered theſe things, and to enter into his glory?"† There is no doubt but we may have ſufficient moral evidence of the truth of facts, where we have not the evidence of ſenſe. We continually act upon this ſuppoſition—We go upon the teſtimony of others—We reaſon from things we know; and are convinced, by ſuch rational deductions,

‖ 1 Cor. 15. 17. † Luke 24. 25, 26.

ductions, of many truths, which we ſhould otherwiſe be ignorant of—We argue from principles that are ſelf-evident. On this foundation we raiſe our ſuperſtructure. We think any concluſion juſt, which is properly deduced from premiſes that are true. We yield our aſſent to truths which appear to follow from other truths.—And we do right.—If we determine to believe, only where we have ſenſible evidence, we ſhall deny a God, a Providence, and almoſt every truth of natural and revealed religion. According to this rule, we muſt reject all thoſe facts which are conveyed to us in hiſtory, and involve ourſelves in endleſs confuſion and abſurdity : One born blind muſt deny that the ſun ever riſes and ſets ; or that there is any ſuch thing as light : The eaſtern monarch who lived in a warm climate, was quite right in refuſing to believe the firſt relations concerning the effects of froſt ; and we could not have blamed him for putting the prieſt to death, who affirmed that in the country from whence he came the waters were congealed into ſolid ice, as he would certainly have done, if the teſtimony of others had not corroborated the declaration of the prieſt, and the Prince had not been favored with underſtanding enough to yield to their united teſtimony, and to believe a thing he had not ſeen, though at firſt he thought it impoſſible.

A man who yields to rational evidence without ſeeing, ſhews greater ſimplicity, candor, and wiſdom,

than he who inſiſts on ocular demonſtration, after ſufficient evidence of another kind hath been propoſed to him. Where there is an attentive candid mind, open to rational conviction, it argues a love of truth, which is a virtuous diſpoſition. Whereas when we believe only what we have ſeen, there is ſcarce room for the exerciſe of virtue at all. We aſſent becauſe we cannot help aſſenting. Such a rational faith, or a faith founded on proper moral evidence is more virtuous, and conſequently more acceptable to God, in proportion to the difficulties it ſurmounts, and the temptations it meets with to infidelity.

God ſaw fit to afford ſenſible evidence of the reſurrection of Chriſt to but few comparatively; but their teſtimony, in connection with its concomitants and conſequences, is a ſufficient ground of a rational belief; and the nature of the thing admits of no other proof. In order to give every one the evidence of ſenſe, which ſome ſceptical men urge as neceſſary, Jeſus muſt have left the realms of bliſs and glory, where his preſence is ſo much needed for us: He muſt have been continually dying and riſing from the dead: And in that caſe, it is much to be queſtioned, whether the commonneſs of the event would not have rendered men leſs attentive to it. So we obſerve the conſtant riſing and ſetting of the ſun, moon, and ſtars, with much leſs attention,

tion, than we do the appearance of a comet. Tho' the conſtant regular motion of the former, affords a much ſtronger proof of the power and goodneſs of God, than the unknown wanderings of the latter.

There is no end of gratifying the perverſe humours of men ; they inſiſt on one thing after another ; and ſome will never be ſatisfied. They raiſe objections contrary to all reaſon and common ſenſe; and if they can but perſuade others to diſbelieve chriſtianity, they give themſelves no concern, tho' they are left without any religion—any principles at all. What advantage theſe men can propoſe to themſelves or to the world, if they ſhould gain their point, it is hard to ſay ; or what good end could be anſwered. Such a ſtate of abſolute uncertainty and doubt would be moſt uncomfortable to individuals, and greatly prejudicial to ſociety. It can hardly be ſuppoſed, that perſons of ſuch an unhappy caſt of mind, would be influenced by any evidence, which it would be agreable to the character of the all-wiſe God to give them. They who reject the teſtimonies we have of the truth of the facts recorded in the new-teſtament, would ſcarce be convinced by any other. Men who are not influenced by the ſtanding means of religion, would not be influenced by any rational methods at all. "If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead." † The infidelity of the moſt proceeds not

† Luke 16. 31.

not from any defect in revelation, or in the evidences of it, but from the perverſeneſs and obſtinacy of their own minds.

Fourthly, We obſerve the bleſſing which our Saviour pronounces on thoſe who have not ſeen, and yet have believed. It is matter of unſpeakable joy, that there is a Saviour born into our apoſtate world. That he "was delivered for our offences, and raiſed again for our juſtification." They were bleſſed, who ſaw Chriſt's day and embraced him as their Saviour and Lord, but the foundation of their bleſſedneſs was not their ſeeing Chriſt with their bodily eyes; it was their belief of things which were not ſeen. Thoſe things in Chriſt which were the proper reaſon for their truſting and rejoicing in him, who lived in the time of his dwelling with man upon earth, were always inviſible, and entirely matters of faith to them, as they are to us. They had much greater reaſon to rejoice on account of thoſe truths, which were revealed concerning Chriſt, and which were not objects of their ſenſes, than on account of what they ſaw and heard.

It was a reaſonable foundation of joy, that one was come into the world who taught the will of God in ſo perfect a manner, and who gave ſuch full demonſtration of his divine power: But it was,

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even then, matter of greater joy, that he came—To ſave them from their ſins by the power of his grace—To make atonement for their offences—To aſſure them, that God was through him reconciling the world to himſelf, not imputing their treſpaſſes to them—and to give them the hopes of a bleſſed immortality. And theſe doctrines were proper objects of faith. Though Chriſt wrought ſuch ſtupendous miracles, which were ſeen and known; yet none could ſee, with their bodily eyes, the dignity of his perſon, or the excellency and importance of his character. Theſe were things propoſed to their faith; and were to be argued from the teſtimony which God gave in thoſe great and viſible effects.

Nor was faith in Chriſt the neceſſary or certain effect of ſeeing what he did, or of hearing what he taught. Many who heard his doctrines, and were witneſſes of his miracles, refuſed to own him in the character of the Meſſiah, they treated him as an impoſtor, and aſcribed the ſupernatural works wrought by him to the power of Satan. When Peter made that noble confeſſion, "Thou art Chriſt, the Son of the living God. Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto him, Bleſſed art thou Simon Bar-jona, for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." ‡

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‡ Matt. 16. 16, 17.

They who rejected him were without excuſe, after the evidences he gave of his divine miſſion, in not believing the teſtimony of God concerning him. But is not the caſe the ſame, with thoſe who reject him now? Though we are not eye-witneſſes of his miracles; though we do not hear the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; yet they are tranſmitted to us, from thoſe who were witneſſes of them, with ſuch marks of authenticity, as are ſufficient to afford matter of rational conviction to every upright and attentive mind. We have enough ſaid of Chriſt in the word of God, and that with ſuch divine atteſtations, as will command an aſſent, ſo far as means can go. The diſadvantage, therefore, which we lay under, with regard to thoſe who lived in our Saviour's day, is not ſo great, as we are apt to imagine. Since we have ſufficient moral evidence of the truth of what was then delivered and done; and thoſe things in Chriſt which are of the greateſt importance, were then as well as now, the immediate objects of faith, and not of ſenſe; and are of ſuch a nature, as that a ſight of him, and an attendance on his perſonal miniſtry, would not certainly produce a belief of them. We are as capable of attending to the evidence we have, and of aſſenting to theſe truths, as we ſhould have been if we had lived in that day.

It is by faith only, we can view him as appointed by the Father to the work of redemption—It is by

by faith only, we can see his fitness to be a Mediator and Saviour—It is by faith, we see that he hath paid the price of our redemption—It is by faith only, we can survey the promises which are great and precious, and that we can have a prospect of that future state of immortal life and happiness which the gospel reveals and offers. When a good man is persuaded of these truths, and at the same time is satisfied from himself that he hath an interest in the promises, he may rejoice with exceeding great joy, though he doth not see Christ with his bodily eyes, or hath not sensible evidence of his resurrection. "Whom having not seen, ye love: In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." §

Instead of finding fault that we did not live in Christ's day, that we had not ocular demonstration of his miracles, and were not favored with his personal instruction, let us be thankful for the great advantages we have, and which we enjoy without fear or molestation. Let us improve the means which God vouchsafes us, of attaining to the perfection of our nature in holiness and happiness. "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." ‡ If we miss of immortal life and glory, it will not be owing to a defect of means, but to our own perverseness and obstinacy.

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§ 1 Pet. 1. 8. ‡ Heb. 4. 1.

"They ſhall come from the eaſt, and from the weſt, and from the north, and from the ſouth, and ſhall ſit down in the kingdom of God;" when many who have eaten and drank in his preſence, who ſat under his gracious inſtruction, and ſome who were employed by him to preach the goſpel of the kingdom, who propheſied in Chriſt's name, and in his name have caſt out devils, and in his name have done many wonderful works, will be rejected in that ſevere language, "Depart from me ye that work iniquity." BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED.

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